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TOP STORIES


Charles Vigliotti, CEO of Long Island Compost of Westbury, at the company's Yaphank composting facility in 2010.

Facility may convert food waste to energy

BY MARK HARRINGTON
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LIPA trustees will vote Wednesday on a power contract for a planned facility that's expected to be the region's first to convert commercial food scraps into biogas to fuel a small power plant and vehicles.

American Organic Energy, an affiliate of Long Island Compost of Westbury, will make a presentation at LIPA's Uniondale headquarters on Wednesday of its plan for a 50,000-square-foot anaerobic digester at its Yaphank vegetative waste facility, chief executive Charles Vigliotti said Monday. Groundbreaking is expected to start in August.

The \$90 million plant would take 180,000 tons of food scraps each year from grocery stores, restaurants and other commercial facilities as far away as New York City for processing into biogas, said Vigliotti. He and his brother Arnold are co-founders and majority owners of the company. The company is also working on an agreement with National Grid to sell excess gas into that company's natural gas infrastructure.

"It's just dumb to put virtually all our food waste into landfills,"

said Vigliotti. "We're just cooking the planet. And on Long Island, the notion that we would put virtually all our commercial food waste onto trucks and carry it to Ohio and North Carolina is just insane."

LIPA's expected approval is just part of a plan that could also benefit from new state legislation to require nearby commercial food operations to send their food scraps to such facilities, a pact with Suffolk County to process wastewater from the plant at the Bergen Point treatment plant, and an agreement with Brookhaven Town to process and sell the town's landfill gas, officials confirmed.

Vigliotti said he's backed an effort by Sen. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach) to include language in the State Senate's recently proposed budget bill that would require grocery stores, restaurants and other operations that produce more than four tons of food waste a week and are within 25 miles of a digester to collect and send the scraps to such facilities. "I'm glad to see it's coming together," said Kaminsky, who is pushing for approval by April 1. "It's matching quite well with the desire to do something about food waste and the infra-

structure" to accommodate it.

Of American Organic Energy's plan to bring the leachate water byproduct of the anaerobic digestion process to the Bergen Point facility, Jason Elan, a spokesman for Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone, said, "I can confirm that the county is having discussions on this project."

The electrical generator at the site will produce 6 megawatts of power: 2 megawatts to handle the electrical needs of the plant, and another 4 megawatts to be sold back to the LIPA grid. A megawatt powers 800 to 1,000 customers. A LIPA spokesman would confirm only that the proposal is scheduled for a vote on Wednesday. LIPA's contract with the facility would be worth an estimated \$83 million over 20 years.

Another part of the plan includes an agreement in principle with Brookhaven Town under which American Organic Energy would purchase landfill gas from Brookhaven for use at the power plant and for resale as renewable natural gas on National Grid pipelines, Vigliotti said. The proposed 20-year agreement in principle with the town amounts to a "very substantial" sum for the town and which "works out for us," he said.

Brookhaven Supervisor Ed Romaine confirmed the agreement in principle, saying, "It makes a heck of a lot of sense for us" to generate a revenue stream from the gas. Brookhaven has also requested that LIPA build an electrical substation at the Brookhaven landfill to accommodate several power projects, including solar panels, fuel cells and possibly battery storage units. Romaine said if LIPA approves the contract with American Organic Energy, the state could provide a close link for the company for its electrical output to the LIPA grid.

"We're talking about the need to locate a substation at the landfill," Romaine said. "For us, it makes sense."

The Long Island Compost affiliate first announced the facility in 2012 as part of a broader plan to address years of complaints about odors, noise and poor air quality around its Yaphank facility, which processes vegetative waste into compost and mulch that's sold throughout the region. The compost operation will continue, in addition to the anaerobic digester, Vigliotti said, adding that complaints from residents have been greatly reduced in recent years.