Message

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Post Tribune **Lawmaker proposes nearly $3 million to help East Chicago schools**

Gary 411 News **East Chicago Calumet Coalition gets set for DuPont clean up**

http://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/news/ct-ptb-inlegis-east-chicago-loan-carrie-gosch-st-1011-20180112-story.html

Lawmaker proposes nearly $3 million to help East Chicago schools

Meredith Colias-Pete Post-Tribune

A state lawmaker from East Chicago has proposed legislation to cover an emergency loan the school district took in the aftermath of the city's lead crisis.

Sen. Lonnie Randolph, D-East Chicago, said his proposal would provide nearly $3 million to pay a state loan the School City of East Chicago secured in August 2016 to relocate the former Carrie Gosch Elementary School.

Weeks before the 2016-17 school year, district officials announced the school's closure, 455 E 148th St., in the city's West Calumet neighborhood after a section of the parking lot's southeast side needed remediation, according to EPA officials.

The $2.8 million loan was used to renovate a new location, the former West Side Junior High School, 4001 Indianapolis Blvd. Even after the move, Carrie Gosch continued to face declining enrollment. The new location was turned into a pre-K center last summer.

"There's no fault of their own at all," Randolph said. "They're going to need additional money. (Having unforseen expenses) diverted from the regular administrative functions of running the school corporation."

Last year, a $41 million school operating referendum put on the ballot failed. Since then, the district has implemented cuts and consolidated jobs and services, Superintendent Paige McNulty said via email.

The former building's future is still under consideration. Last year, school officials met with a couple of "interested parties," McNulty said. The district is now looking at repurposing the building for other needs, she said.

"I am grateful for the support that our senators have given to our district," she said. "I have been in communication with them and I am hopeful that they will grant this loan forgiveness to continue to help our district recover."

Randolph sponsored similar legislation last year. Late in the legislative session, after the initial bill did not advance, it was proposed to include money for the East Chicago district in the state budget, which did not happen, he said.

He said he felt optimistic the bill would have support to pass this year.

The neighborhood where the former school building, built in the late 1990s, is located — in Zone 1 of the USS Lead Superfund site — is grappling with a decades-in-the-making environmental and public health crisis with highly elevated lead and arsenic soil levels.

Soil tests conducted in the nearby West Calumet Housing Complex registered contamination for lead and arsenic as high as 228 times the level that U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials consider potentially hazardous to children.

The last of more than 1,000 residents left the nearby West Calumet Housing Complex last year.

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http://gary411news.com/news-detail.aspx?typeID=12&newsid=44587

East Chicago Calumet Coalition gets set for DuPont clean up

Contributed By:The 411 News

Wants to know what the EPA has been doing for the last 20 years

Bracing for another iceberg in East Chicago's sea of environmental concerns, some city residents and members of the East Chicago Calumet Coalition spent Saturday prepping for the EPA's upcoming meeting on its plans to clean up the former DuPont Chemicals site.

For nearly 100 years, the site in the city's southeastern corner has been home to companies that manufactured industrial chemicals and also used the land for storage and disposal of waste products from the manufacturing process. Before DuPont, it was the Grasselli Corporation. Today's owner is Chemours, a former subsidiary of DuPont.

Hard lessons of community organizing were learned as residents and activists, in 2016-17, tackled the lead and arsenic soil contamination of the USS Lead Superfund site in the city's Calumet neighborhoods. Now in 2018, ECCC and its partner – the Community Strategy Group – are again putting their voices together to respond to the EPA on Wednesday, January 10 for the DuPont cleanup.

It's a formal process where the EPA announces its plans and then calls for public comment. In November 2017, the EPA announced a $22.6 million cleanup plan and scheduled this week's meeting for the public to hear the plan. The agency also set a two-month time period, until January 26, for the public to submit written comments.

And it's similar to the process residents are undergoing with the area's electric and gas utility, NIPSCO, as it seeks an increase in its natural gas rates. Each side listens, without discussions or determinations.

Heading into Wednesday's meeting, the two groups have obtained an extension of the public comment period, said Maritza Lopez, ECCC steering committee member. "Our attorneys need to see more documents before we can comment. The EPA will give us a new date at Wednesday's meeting."

Both groups want to know what steps have the U.S. EPA and the State of Indiana taken since 1997, when the DuPont facility was designated as needing corrective action. Investigations by the EPA have shown some migration of chemicals and metals that are hazardous to vegetation, animal and human life into the soil and groundwater at the site.

The facility sits only hundreds of feet from residential areas. According to a November 30 analysis in the *NWI Times*, "The former DuPont site could be a source of groundwater contamination in the USS Lead Superfund site, where a separate EPA cleanup of contaminated residential yards is underway. As part of the EPA's involvement in the Superfund site, the agency is investigating basement flooding issues and the potential for groundwater contamination in basements and homes."

ECCC steering committee member Tara Nelson told attendees, "If you don't know the technical issues, come and speak about your flooded basements. Ask what that contaminated water is doing to your own health and your children's."

The public hearing will be held in the Pastrick Branch of the East Chicago Public Library at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday.

Next week is another important date for the community groups. On January 16, oral arguments will begin in federal court on their motion to intervene in the consent decree that negotiated the settlement for the USS Lead Superfund site.
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