

Business, labor back proposal to build SunCoke plant

Middletown planners recommend rezoning for Monroe facility.

By [Ed Richter](#)

Staff Writer

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MIDDLETOWN — A strong showing of support from the Middletown's business and labor union sectors offset a number of vocal Monroe opponents Wednesday at a special meeting of the Middletown Planning Commission.

The city building's council chambers were packed Wednesday, March 26, when the commission unanimously voted to recommend the rezoning of 157 acres of land off Ohio 4.

The parcel is the apparent chosen site for a \$340 million coke-making and electric generation plant proposed by SunCoke Energy of Knoxville, Tenn.

The planning commission's charge is to determine whether land should be rezoned and not what would eventually be constructed there.

At Wednesday's meeting, the planning commission voted to recommend the zoning change to Middletown City Council for final approval. The earliest the council could act on the matter would be May 6.

The city requested the zone change from low-density residential to industrial use to facilitate the construction of the proposed plant.

Planning Director Marty Kohler also said that the area, which borders a residential area in the city of Monroe, is designated for industrial use in the city's 2005 Master Plan.

Kohler also noted that the land is one of the last areas for industrial expansion left in the city and that it has rail and highway access.

Kohler said a number of major businesses, labor unions and business leaders have expressed support for the zoning change, including James Wainscott, chairman, president and CEO of AK Steel; Douglas McNeill, president and CEO of Atrium Medical Center; Jim Akers, CEO of Akers Packaging Service; Joe Wolf, president of Precision Strip Inc.; The Butler County Building and Construction Trades Council; the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, Local Lodge 1943; Butler County Commissioners Charles Furmon, Gregory Jollivette and Donald Dixon; Daniel Smith, president

of SK Construction Co.; Greg Martin; Bill Triick, president and CEO of The Chamber of Commerce, representing Middletown, Monroe and Trenton; Fred DiBiasi, president and CEO of American Savings Bank; John Lima, of the Miller Brewing Co.'s Trenton brewery; Ken Cohen, of Cohen Brothers Inc. and president of Middletown Moving Forward.

SunCoke officials declined to comment after the meeting on the planning commission's decision. "We're pleased," said Alan McCoy, AK Steel's vice president of government and public relations. "We're eagerly awaiting City Council action."

SunCoke project by the numbers

Number of coke ovens: 100

Approximate cost of investment: \$340 million

Time to construct the plant: 14 to 18 months, after all local, state and federal approvals are secured.

Construction workers needed: About 500

Estimated payroll during construction period:

\$65 million

Permanent jobs at the plant: 70 to 80

Average pay at SunCoke's Haverhill plant: \$63,000 plus benefits

Tons of coke to be produced: 550,000 tons a year

Megawatts of electricity to be produced: 50

(1 megawatt can power about 800 homes)

Length of AK's exclusive customer agreement with SunCoke for coke and electricity: 20 years with additional options

Source: SunCoke Energy, AK Steel Corp.

Contact this reporter at (513) 705-2871 or erichter@coxohio.com.

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