



New group backing Pike

By Leslie Bridgers
Reporter - American Journal

WESTBROOK (March 26): Deliberations on Pike Industries' right to operate and expand its Spring Street quarry have begun, and a group of Westbrook residents has answered the company's call for support.



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About 30 residents have started a group called Citizens for Balanced Growth in Westbrook, which announced its formation this week and launched a Web site, www.westbrookcitizens.org.

Ron Usher, a former Westbrook city councilor and longtime legislator, is serving as chairman of the committee. He said he had been paying some attention to the conflict between Pike Industries and Idexx Laboratories – two Westbrook companies with incompatible expansion plans. However, it was a call from an old friend and former employee of Blue Rock, the quarrying company that formerly occupied the Spring Street site, asking Usher for support that led to his involvement.

Usher said the inability of the two companies to come up with a compromise troubled him.

"I said, 'Why can't we work together?'" he said.

Furthermore, Usher said he believes Pike's employees in Westbrook are valuable to the city and need to stay here – something he fears might not happen if the company can't build an asphalt plant on the site.

Usher began calling around town in an effort to recruit members for the group and found many people were interested in supporting the cause.

"We're gathering more people each day," he said.

In 2007, businesses in and around the Five Star Industrial Park, including Idexx, as well as residents of the area, formed a group called Westbrook Works in opposition to Pike's attempt to expand its operations.

The formation of Citizens for Balanced Growth follows a recent effort by Pike and its public relations firm, Savvy Inc., to call attention to the company's history and intentions moving forward.

The company has sent out a press release and placed an advertisement in the American

Journal and. This week, signs in front of Pike's property and residences along Spring Street read, "PIKE = JOBS."

Pike also recently filed a lawsuit in response the city's push to rezone Pike's property from industrial to light manufacturing – a move that would prevent Pike from moving forward with its expansion plans.

At the same time, the city's Zoning Board began meeting Tuesday to hear from Pike and Westbrook Works, which both appealed a decision by Code Enforcement Officer Rick Gouzie regarding Pike's rights on Spring Street.

Gouzie determined in January that Pike has the right to continue operating as it has been, but doesn't have the right to add rock-crushing, concrete and asphalt plants at the site.

On Tuesday, the board heard from Pike's lawyer. Westbrook Works is scheduled to present its case Thursday, and, if the process continues along in a timely manner, the public will get an opportunity to weigh in on the issue Tuesday.

Usher said he and other members of his group are preparing to speak at that meeting, which will be held at 7 p.m. in Room 114 at Westbrook High School.

He said before Tuesday's meeting, Pike footed the bill for dinner for the group at Ruby Tuesday, where they discussed what would be happening that night.

Pike has invited Westbrook residents to multiple dinners and presentations this month, which Westbrook Works member Gary Swanson sees as the company buying support.

"I certainly understand their attempt to get people involved," Swanson said about the formation of Citizens for Balanced Growth in Westbrook. However, he thought the company took its effort too far in buying dinner for people.

Swanson did say that a representative from Barton Gingold, Idexx's public relations firm, invited him and his neighbors to a meeting a couple months ago at a nearby church. But, he said, it wasn't for the milk and cookies they offered.

"I'm simply representing my house, my family," he said.

Swanson even started his own petition that he passed around to his neighbors, which, he said, they signed willingly.

"I didn't offer anybody free meals," he said.

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