

Work underway on \$5M waterline

By **TIM COOK**

Special to the Spirit

SHENANDOAH JUNCTION – Workers have begun putting in a \$5.6 million waterline to serve the Rockwool insulation factory slated for Ranson.

Rockwool officials announced Friday that the Denmark-based company will partner with Jefferson Utilities Inc. to privately finance the construction.

The company's decision came after months of turmoil starting in July when community members started to protest the project. The Jefferson County Development Authority had delayed voting on a state financing package for the waterline for months, prompting the president and 11 members of the JCDA to resign in November.

“Owing to delays in approving the JCDA bond

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Waterline

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funding, we are compelled to privately finance the waterline that will serve the Rockwool Ranson facility as well as other users,” Michael Zarin, Rockwool’s vice president of communications, said in a prepared statement. “The waterline will bring much-needed infrastructure to Jefferson Orchards and the communities nearby – increasing access to reliable water for our neighbors.”

The four-mile waterline is an extension to the Jefferson Utilities’ water service system serving more than 3,000 homes and business in Jefferson County, including 31 housing subdivisions. The company operates 15 water treatment facilities.

In addition to the Rockwool factory, the waterline extension project will serve other still-undeveloped industrial sites in the 400-acre former Jefferson Orchards property where the factory is located near North Jefferson Elementary School off Charles Town Road.

The waterline will also allow Jefferson Utilities to supply water to North Jefferson Elementary and existing about 300 homes in the Fox Glen subdivision of Kearneysville that use individual wells as their water sources, as well as homes and businesses built in the area in the future.

Rockwool said it was contributing \$5.3 million toward the waterline extension project. Jefferson Utilities, which had already spent more than \$400,000 in pre-construction costs on the project, will fund other costs for the project. The JCDA had estimated the project would cost \$7 million.

Construction on the waterline is expected to be completed by the end of this year, Zarin said.



ROBERT SNYDER

Construction on the waterline for Rockwool is expected to be completed by the end of this year, according to the company’s spokesman Michael Zarin. Rockwool said it was contributing \$5.3 million toward the waterline extension project. Jefferson Utilities, which had already spent more than \$400,000 in pre-construction costs on the project, will fund other costs for the project. The Jefferson County Development Authority had estimated the project would cost \$7 million. State funding for the waterline project had been offered as an economic development initiative for Jefferson County, with the Rockwool factory envisioned as a catalyst.

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Hiring is underway for the factory that will bring about 150 jobs. Rockwool is making an estimated \$150 million investment in the project.

Lee Snyder, Jefferson Utilities’ president and owner, did not return calls for comment. Previously, he has said Rockwool will pay the water service rate as every other Jefferson Utilities customer.

Snyder has also said that the JCDA’s decision to turn down state funding for the waterline extension would likely lead to a service rate increase for Jefferson Utilities customers. (Snyder is not related to Robert Snyder, the publisher of the *Spirit*, or anyone else at the *Spirit*.)

Rockwool and Jefferson Utilities officials said the waterline extension project is proceeding with construction plans already approved by the West Virginia Public Service

Commission and the state health and highways departments.

Plans to construct the waterline extension had been on hold while Rockwool and Jefferson Utilities awaited for the JCDA’s board of directors to vote on issuing a bond directly to the West Virginia Water Development Authority to pay for the entire so-called Route 9 Sewer Project. The state water authority had arranged to pay for the project over 40 years – in part using revenue from future customers the waterline is anticipated to serve.

No definite date for a JCDA board vote on the state’s waterline funding arrangement had been scheduled. On Thursday, the Jefferson County Commission plans to select several new JCDA board members that would give the board enough members to convene a quorum to make the decision.

Following the mass resignation from the JCDA on Nov. 9, the county commission has been accepting applications for volunteers to fill

several of the vacancies. It’s been unclear when the JCDA would have quorum again and schedule a vote on the water bond financing.

News of Rockwool’s decision to build a second U.S. factory in West Virginia came in mid-2017, but it wasn’t until after the June 26 groundbreaking that citizens began to express alarm – mostly about the pollution the factory would emit along with the facility’s role in drawing heavy industrial development to the county.

Through much of the summer, meetings of the JCDA, the county commission and the Ranson and Charles Town city councils were packed with anti-Rockwool protests.

After news of the waterline work broke on the *Spirit*’s website on Friday, Jefferson County Vision sent out a news release saying the “unlawful waterline” should have been privately financed in the first place.

“The foreign multinational company says it will no longer seek gov-

ernment financing for the waterline in their effort to build a giant insulation factory with toxic emissions next to Jefferson County schools,” the group’s statement reads. “That’s great news for West Virginia taxpayers, who won’t have to bail out Jefferson Utilities for this ill-considered project when Rockwool leaves. In the meantime, Rockwool should pay for their own infrastructure and not try to push their costs on to taxpayers or Jefferson Utilities ratepayers.”

JCV went on to reiterate its firm opposition against the Rockwool factory. “This development shows that Rockwool is increasingly isolated with little public support for their plan to build heavy industry in the heart of Jefferson County,” the group said. “No matter who pays for it, Rockwool is the wrong fit for our community.”

A new pro-Rockwool citizens group called Jefferson County Prosperity on Friday issued a statement applauding Rockwool and Jefferson Utilities for putting in the water line.

The statement described the company and water utility as “going above and beyond in their dedication to our community.”

Just as the JCDA had delayed a vote on the funding arrangement for the waterline for Rockwool, a similar state funding arrangement with the City of Charles Town over a new sewer line to serve the Rockwool factory has been repeatedly put off since August.

At a Charles Town City Council meeting last week, council members said would hold off on a vote until getting more information from the state. They have questions about information Rockwool provided to the Department of Environmental Protection.