

Toms River mayor, council urge residents to give input on Ciba Superfund site settlement



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TOMS RIVER - The Township Council's Jan. 25 meeting is being moved to 4 p.m. to allow residents and council members to attend a "Community Speak-Out" about a proposed state settlement with BASF, owners of the former Ciba-Geigy Superfund site.

Environmental advocacy group Save Barnegat Bay is holding the "Community Speak-Out" forum from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Jan. 25 at Toms River High School North. The forum will give residents the chance to speak out about the state settlement, which would preserve 1,000 acres of the BASF property, while allowing about 250 acres to be redeveloped.

Township leaders and a growing group of environmental activists have objected to the plan, which would end a lawsuit filed by the state Department of Environmental Protection in 2007 that accused Ciba of damaging New Jersey's natural resources by polluting parts of its more than 1,200-acre property.

Ciba forum: Unhappy with NJ deal for Ciba Superfund pollution site? Speak out in Toms River

Council President Matt Lotano said the council meeting was rescheduled at the request of Mayor Maurice B. "Mo" Hill Jr., so it would not conflict with the forum. Hill and Lotano are urging residents to go to the forum to express their views on the settlement proposal.

Hill and the township council oppose the settlement, asking the state to instead require BASF to turn over the 250 acres to the township for preservation as open space, and saying the company should have to compensate the community and those whose health was affected by pollution at Ciba.

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The massive property off Route 37 and Oak Ridge Parkway became BASF's property after it acquired Ciba in 2009. Toms River Chemical Co., which became Ciba-Geigy, manufactured industrial dyes and resins at the site for decades; in 1982, the property was designated as a Superfund site by the federal Environmental Protection Agency.

Once the county's largest employer, Ciba-Geigy, which was eagerly welcomed to Toms River when the plant opened in 1952, would eventually become better known as a notorious polluter.

Waste from the dye production process was tossed into drums in an unlined landfill on the land, and also dumped into pits.

A groundwater pollution plume migrated off the former Ciba site as far back as the 1960s, seeping into public water supplies. Even though it's been greatly reduced in size, part of it still flows underneath the nearby Oak Ridge neighborhood.

Save Barnegat Bay's "Community Speak-Out" will be recorded with the video submitted to DEP, Hill and Lotano said. Additionally, a transcript of the event will be included in Save Barnegat Bay's submission and written statements will be accepted at the event and forwarded to DEP.

Jean Mikle covers Toms River and several other Ocean County towns, and has been writing about local government and politics at the Jersey Shore for nearly 38 years. She's also passionate about the Shore's storied music scene. Contact her: @jeanmikle, jmikle@gannettnj.com.