

BUSINESS

Energy company founded locally

OroCarbo anticipates opening in 2026 to process biomass

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OROVILLE >> A new energy and carbon-based solutions company, OroCarbo, is making strides toward its anticipated opening in 2026.

The land for the company, a 62-acre parcel on the north side of the Koppers Superfund site bordered by Georgia Pacific way and Baggett Marysville Road zoned for heavy industrial use, was secured earlier this year. and a recent grant from the Butte County Fire Safe Council for \$173,594 will fund the facility's initial engineering plans.

"It's been a long journey to get this far," said Brian Wong, local businessman and OroCarbo founder. "The idea for the company came to me in 2020 after all the fires we had. I wanted to find a local sustainable solution for some of our problems like forest and agriculture management. I founded the company in 2021, and for the past three years, we've been figuring things out, getting educated, talking to people, researching the tech, reading white papers, attending conferences, creating partnerships and building the business plan."

The facility, anticipated to require an approximate total investment of \$300 million, will transform locally collected biomass, initially old wood from local orchards, to produce renewable diesel, hydrogen, graphite and graphene with zero waste. In the future the plant will obtain additional biomass material from nearby forests and fire safety programs.

The plant will employ 30 to 40 people and include eight modules and 64 reactors for the processing. Operating at full capacity the plant will process 500 wet tons of biomass per day generating 32,000 gallons of renewable diesel and 42 tons of biochar, a charcoal-like substance used to improve soil health, raise soil pH, remediate polluted soils, sequester carbon, lower greenhouse gas emissions and improve soil moisture.

Through it biomass processing, OroCarbo will sequester 250 tons of carbon, or greenhouse gas, per day.

"Living trees absorb carbon naturally to grow. During the tree's life cycle, it retains the carbon it has absorbed," explained Sara Nolind, OroCarbo project coordinator. "When the tree dies, the carbon, or CO₂, is released back into the air when the tree is burned or decomposes naturally.

“OroCarbo will process the newly dead tree through our technology and capture and reform the CO2 into a new form and product. This process eliminates the carbon from the trees from being naturally released into the air.”

A boon for Wong in helping secure the necessary future financing for OroCarbo was the June 20 announcement by the BCFSC of the issuance of an investment-grade rating for woody biomass in the Butte County Biomass Opportunity Zone. This zone covers a 75-mile radius from the center point of Oroville. This is the first BDO Zone BBB rating for woody biomass in the state.

The BDO Zone’s investment-grade rating denotes good viability of biomass material availability to meet the intake requirements of new biofuels, renewable chemical, biogas and biomaterial production plants. The rating signifies a strong supply chain and infrastructure characteristics that meet the requirements for new facility construction and operations such as OroCarbo.

“The BBB rating definitely creates opportunity for financing to support biomass companies to get established here,” said Taylor Nilsson, BCFSC executive director.