

This is what's right about Port Aransas raising a stink about desalination

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(Photo: Tim Acosta/Caller-Times)

Add water to the necessities that Port Aransas residents need but don't want made near them. They blocked an oil refinery on Harbor Island five years ago, and now they appear to be preparing to battle a desalination proposal. They're starting to look like serious impediments to the prosperity of their neighbors in Nueces and San Patricio counties.

They should recognize that a lot more than money is at stake here. This is a drought-prone region where having enough water to sustain the population and its way of life is always a big worry.

Harbor Island is no seaside paradise. It's a property with an industrial history. Using it for that purpose did not stop Port Aransas from becoming a Gulf Coast tourism destination and second-home community.

More: [Tide of opposition forms to Port of Corpus Christi's desalination plans \(/story/news/local/2018/07/20/tide-opposition-forms-port-corpus-christi-desalination-plans/806877002/\)](#)

But, that said, Port Aransas residents have raised valid concerns. The word "desalination" brings to mind crystal-clear water. But it's a smokestack industry that produces a byproduct that must be disposed of or reused. The effort to reuse it is costly and not as simple as pouring table salt into shakers. And pumping it back into the bay or gulf is bad for the environment. Brine from a desalination plant comes out too warm and salty, and it contains ingredients from the desalination process that don't belong in seawater.

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If disposal makes more sense than reusing, then the next question is: where? This is an issue that doesn't receive nearly enough attention when folks around here talk up desalination. All Corpus Christi Bay-area residents should thank Port Aransas for bringing it up. And all should expect better than a bunch of hemming and hawing for an answer.

The Port of Corpus Christi, which is seeking the desalination permit, is quick to say that a desalination plant is not imminent. The port is just seeking the permit so that if and when the day comes that the city of Corpus Christi or Nueces County or a combination of parties wants to build one, they can start right away under the port's umbrella.

That sounds like smart, visionary thinking on the port's part. We commend the initiative.

But what got Port Aransas residents riled was how they found out about the permit application — not from an outreach effort by the port, but from a public notice by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. Public notices are fine print that not everyone reads.

In defense of the port, desalination has been a regional goal for a generation. It is not a covert operation. But the takeaway for the port is that transparency can be an excellent consensus-building tool. The port could have anticipated that Port Aransas would be leery if not downright combative. After the refinery wrangle, fairly or unfairly, they are not predisposed to trust the port.

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Port Aransas Mayor Charles Bujan listens to Port of Corpus Christi CEO Sean Strawbridge address the City Council on July 19, 2018. Strawbridge and other port staff were in attendance to address concerns about a pending permit application the port has with the TCEQ for a seawater desalination plant on Harbor Island. (Photo: Tim Acosta/Caller-Times)

The people of Port Aransas have a right to know what will be done to protect coastal habitat and their city's ambiance. We all do. We all, also, need water.

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