

Citizens Ask Commissioners' Court to Oppose Gas Plant

[By ops@our-hometown.com](mailto:ops@our-hometown.com)
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A group of landowners in the Blue area have asked the Lee County Commissioners Court to adopt a resolution opposing the location of a natural gas power plant in their community. The resolution was submitted by the Move the Gas Plant steering committee, which was formed this summer in opposition to a plan by Sandow Lakes Energy to build a 1,200-megawatt gas power plant in the Blue area. The 15-member steering committee was formed after a July community meeting in Blue that attracted more than 150 people. If adopted, the resolution would oppose locating the gas plant in Blue and request Sandow Lakes Energy instead locate its plant at the site of the now-closed Alcoa aluminum smelter and coal plants in nearby Milam County.

Travis Brown, a spokesman for Move the Gas Plant, said the group asked County Judge Frank Malinak to place the resolution on the court's Sept. 23 agenda. While the group had not received confirmation that the resolution would be on the next agenda as of press time, Brown said, "We are hopeful our county judge and commissioners will stand up for their constituents and not stand by as this Dallas real estate company reaps profits at the expense of our vibrant rural Lee County community."

Even if the Court adopts the resolution, it would not in the county power to stop the power plant; however, Brown said it could prove helpful to efforts being launched by Move the Gas Plant. He pointed out a similar resolution was passed by the Lee County commissioners court last year regarding the City of Austin's aquifer storage and recovery project. Brown said that resolution may have played a part in the rumored location of Austin's project in Bastrop County instead of Lee County.

Brown said, "The proposed gas plant would be one of the largest such power plants in Texas and would result in negative impacts on the Blue area, including decreased property values, harmful air pollution, and groundwater and surface water impacts. It makes no sense to build this huge industrial facility in Blue when there is a more suitable and feasible site fifteen miles away."

The site of the proposed gas plant is at the intersection of CR 309 and CR 312, just west of the Adina Christian Church, according to the company's air permit application recently filed with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). That site is owned by Sandow Lakes Ranch, an affiliate of Sandow Lakes Energy. The 33,000-acre Sandow Lakes Ranch is the site of Alcoa's former Sandow strip mine, smelter and coal

plants. That land was purchased in 2021 by Xebec, a Dallas-based real estate development company.

Brown said, "The main reason Sandow Lakes Energy wants to build the gas plant in Blue is to be near the Matterhorn natural gas pipeline, which passes through northwest Lee County. Sandow Lakes Ranch owns tracts of land that connect the proposed site in Blue all the way to the old smelter and power plant site in Milam County. It's really a question of how much money the company wants to spend connecting the gas plant to its fuel source," Brown said.

The proposed resolution states, "Sandow Lakes Energy could locate the proposed gas plant at the old Alcoa site and include the cost of a longer connection to the Matterhorn pipeline as a necessary cost of doing business."

Brown said locating the gas plant at the old Alcoa site would result in far less negative impacts, since there are no nearby farms, ranches or residents there. He said the company has contended moving the site of the gas plant "would not fit in" with its development plans for the old Alcoa property. "If this gas plant is as clean and nonpolluting as the company claims, then there's no valid reason it should not be built at the old Alcoa industrial site," Brown said.

The proposed resolution also states that "if Sandow Lakes Energy maintains it cannot re-locate the plant or cannot absorb the cost of such relocations as the cost of doing business, then it should abandon the project. Any presumed benefits to Lee County by having the gas plant built in Blue would be far outweighed by its negative impacts, especially on what is the fastest growing part of the county."

A public notice regarding Sandow Lakes Energy air permit application with the TCEQ was published in the Lexington Leader last week. Brown said Move the Gas Plant will be seeking a public hearing on the air permit application in the Lexington area. He said Sen. Lois Kolkhorst has agreed to ask the TCEQ for such a hearing. Brown also said Move The Gas Plant is hiring a public interest environmental law firm and likely will be calling for a contested case hearing to oppose the air permit. Go to www.movethegasplant.org to learn more.

The tenets of the proposed resolution are:

WHEREAS, the Commissioner's Court of Lee County strives to make sound decisions on issues that affect the quality of life for its constituents;

WHEREAS, Sandow Lakes Energy (SL Energy Power Plant I, LLC) proposes to build a 1,200-megawatt natural gas power generation plant;

WHEREAS, Sandow Lakes Energy proposes to build its power plant in the Blue community in north Lee County;

WHEREAS, the proposed site in Blue is on the far western end of the 33,000 acres of property owned by Sandow Lakes Energy's affiliate, Sandow Lakes Ranch (SL Property I LP);

WHEREAS, the proposed site is an extremely rural area of Lee County and is very close to private farms, ranches, homes, and the Adina Christian Church and Cemetery;

WHEREAS, the allure of living in Lee County includes a slower pace of life, a stronger sense of community, and a close connection to the natural world for the people who live there;

WHEREAS, locating a large industrial facility such as the gas plant would dramatically disrupt and alter the rural nature of the surrounding Blue community;

WHEREAS, locating the gas plant in Blue likely would result in decreased values and marketability of properties; increased noise, lights and traffic; groundwater and surface water impacts; air pollution; and collateral burdens on county infrastructure;

WHEREAS, Sandow Lakes Energy has a more suitable and feasible alternative location its plant, that being the site of the old Alcoa smelter and coal plants, some 15 miles away and where Sandow Lakes Ranch intends to locate other industry;

WHEREAS, the Alcoa industrial site is situated in the midst of the Sandow Lakes Ranch and is distant from any private farms, ranches and homes;

WHEREAS, locating the proposed gas plant at the Alcoa industrial site would result in far fewer negative impacts than if located in the Blue community;

WHEREAS, Sandow Lakes Energy maintains it prefers to locate its gas plant in the Blue community because it would be closer to the Matterhorn gas pipeline, which crosses north Lee County and would be the fuel source for the proposed plant;

WHEREAS, Sandow Lakes Energy could locate the proposed gas plant at the old Alcoa industrial site and include the cost of a longer connection to the Matterhorn pipeline as a necessary cost for its project;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commissioner's Court hereby opposes the location of the Sandow Lakes Energy gas power plant in north Lee County and requests the company instead locate the plant at the old Alcoa industrial site;

FURTHERMORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Commissioner's Court hereby requests that if Sandow Lakes Energy maintains it cannot relocate its power plant or cannot absorb the cost of such relocation as a cost of doing business, then it should abandon the project.