

# MTGP reflects on 1-year anniversary of opposition

## *Group claims success in delaying gas plant*

It was a year ago this month that Blue residents organized Move the Gas Plant (MTGP) in opposition to plans by Sandow Lakes Energy (SLE) to build a 1,200-megawatt natural gas power plant at the intersection of CR 309 and CR 312 in the Blue community.

Members of the group say actions they've taken in the year since it organized have caused major delays in the Dallas real estate company's plan to build the power plant.

"When we first organized, some people in the county skeptically shook their heads, doubting our ability to stop this power plant," said Travis Brown, a Blue resident spokesman for MTGP. "One year later, some still are shaking their heads in doubt and even derision."

Brown maintains the group's efforts in the past year have been effective. "If MTGP had not organized last July and taken action, it's likely SLE would have obtained its state air emissions permit months ago," he says. "It's likely SLE would already be building the gas plant."

While some bulldozing of trees at the site has occurred, SLE cannot begin construction until it has its air permit, says Brown,

who believes SLE likely expected to have its air permit by the end of 2024, or in early 2025 at the latest, and that it had planned to begin major construction this summer.

"When SLE submitted its air permit application last August to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ), it paid an extra \$20,000 in filing fees to have its application expedited," Brown says.

He says it likely will be many months or maybe well into next year before SLE can obtain its air permit, if granted.

During the past year, actions taken by MTGP have included:

- Forming a 20-member steering committee and raising funds for a legal challenge to SLE's plans.

- Hiring a "premier" public interest environmental law firm to prosecute that legal challenge.

- Hiring a noted air quality expert, whose analysis of SLE's air permit application found many flaws and deficiencies.

- Asking State Senator Lois Kolkhorst, and State Rep. Stan Gerdes to request the TCEQ hold a public meeting on SLE's application in Lexington.

- Requesting the TCEQ require a contested case

hearing be held over SLE's application on behalf of impacted Lee County landowners.

- Succeeding in getting the Lee County Commissioner's Court to pass a resolution that detailed damage the proposed power plant would inflict on the Blue community and requested SLE move its plant to a less damaging site.

- Obtaining a grant from the national Sierra Club to help fund the legal and technical challenge to SLE's permit.

As a result of these actions, Brown says MTGP has set up a serious roadblock to SLE's ambitious plans.

Gerdes and Kolkhorst requested that TCEQ hold a public meeting, and that meeting was held on April 24.

TCEQ's contested case hearing may begin before the end of this year, but likely will extend into 2026.

"Our position has always been that it's wrong to put a huge power plant in Blue when there is a very feasible and much less damaging location nearby," Brown says. "That location is the site the old Alcoa smelter and coal plants on Sandow Lakes Ranch."