

Lexington Leader

SERVING LEE COUNTY, TEXAS

Blue Neighborhood Watch Gets Update on Gas Plant

Steering committee of group continues to seek moving the plant

October 23, 2024



Travis Brown is seen speaking at a Neighborhood Watch meeting held at the Blue VFD on Thursday, October 17. About 60 people showed up for the meeting and to learn about further developments concerning a 1200 mega watt gas power plant proposed for their area.

Opponents of a proposal by Sandow Lakes Energy to locate a natural gas power generation plant in the Blue community presented an update of their activities at a meeting of the Blue Neighborhood Watch on Oct. 17. About 60 people attended the meeting at the Blue Volunteer Fire Department, including Lee County Judge Frank Malinak who made a presentation during the meeting.

Much of the discussion centered around a resolution submitted by the Move the Gas Plant steering committee to Judge Malinak in mid-August. The committee asked him to place the resolution on an upcoming commissioners' court agenda. The resolution asks the commissioners to oppose putting the gas plant in the Blue community and instead support moving it to the site of the old Alcoa aluminum smelter and coal plants, some 15 miles away in Milam County. Judge Malinak told the crowd that he was preparing an alternate resolution for the commissioners' court concerning the gas plant.

Travis Brown, spokesperson for Move the Gas Plant steering committee said, "Our resolution is a reasonable, feasible and defensible position for Lee County to take." He continued, "If built, the 1,200-megawatt gas plant would be among the largest such plants in Texas and would dramatically alter the rural nature of the Blue community."

Judge Malinak told the **Leader**, "I agree that the plant should not be at the current proposed location. The plant could be moved deeper within SLR properties, but still in Lee County. We know it can't go back to the old Alcoa site because of legal restrictions on that property. So Travis Brown's proposal is not tenable."

Brown said negative impacts from the plant would include air pollution, noise, lights, traffic and decreased property values. The company is proposing to build the gas power plant at the intersection of county roads 309 and 312 in the heart of Blue.

Judge Malinak said, "I have to consider all the facts in this case, as I told those at the meeting in Blue the other night. I care about the people in Blue just like I care about all citizens in Lee County. I have a responsibility to take the best path forward for the safety of our citizens."

Brown said that Judge Malinak appears to want the gas plant built in Blue, partly because of additional property tax revenue it might provide the county. He said Judge Malinak's presentation at the meeting focused on the mechanics of how the gas plant would operate and the air pollution measures it would implement. Brown seems to be suspicious of Judge Malinak's intentions, pointing out Judge Malinak's comments published in the Leader recently where the Judge said that if it can be shown the gas plant does not pollute, then having it built would be a "win for everyone."

At the meeting, Brown told the crowd, "How would that be a win for those of us in Blue?"

Although the county has no authority to stop the gas plant, Brown said a strong resolution from the commissioners court could help the steering committee's efforts. Those efforts include opposing the company's application for an air permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. After the meeting, Brown said, "We look forward to seeing the judge's resolution."

An Austin law firm hired by the Move the Gas Plant group has submitted a request to the TCEQ that a contested case hearing be held over the air permit application.

Also speaking during the meeting was Michele Gangnes, another steering committee member. She said a big unknown about the gas plant is the amount of water it will require. She also raised the specter of Sandow Lakes Ranch seeking groundwater from Lee County for other projects. She suggested those projects might include more industrial or other facilities with power and water needs that Sandow Lakes Ranch might locate near the gas plant in Blue.

Charlotte Leonard, Julie Drake and Trish Siler, who all live with their families on CR 312 very close to the proposed site, also spoke during the meeting. Leonard said she was concerned that the judge was not standing up for the folks in Blue. Judge Malinak said during the meeting that he had to look out for the interests of all of Lee County, not just the Blue community.

Sandow Lakes Energy is owned by Xebec, a Dallas real estate development company. In 2021, Xebec bought the 33,000-acre site of the old Alcoa smelter, coal plants and strip mine, now called Sandow Lakes Ranch.

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