

Blue residents speak out against power plant

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by [Philip Concan](#)

Lee County Judge Frank Malinak III addresses the crowd in Blue. PHOTO BY PHILIP CONCAN.

Last Wednesday, July 10, a capacity crowd of more than 150 residents of Blue came out to hear what Sandow Lakes Energy (SLE) had to say about the proposed 1200-megawatt power plant proposed to be built in Lee County. To help pay for the project, SLE is applying for \$295 million from the \$10 billion Texas Energy Fund, which the legislature created, and voters approved last year to help private companies build new natural gas power generation plants in Texas.

Travis Brown, a Blue resident and an outspoken opponent to the project who organized Wednesday's meeting, said, "Taxpayer dollars should not go to gas plants that destroy rural communities when there are logical and feasible alternatives," Brown said. "In this case, Sandow Lakes Energy has a more suitable site readily available – at the old Alcoa site in Milam County."

The SLE power plant has been rumored to be built on a 33-acre site just west of Adina Church near the intersection of CR 309 and CR 312. Brown urged local elected officials to tell the Texas Public Utility Commission it should not provide any Texas Energy Fund money to Sandow Lakes Energy unless it agrees to move the location of the plant from Blue to the old Alcoa industrial site.

Blue residents peppered SLE's Vice President Ned Ross with questions about air pollution and other negative impacts from the proposed plant. "There will be no visible emissions," Ross told the crowd. He stated that the only emission from the plant would be CO₂ and water, and he would give no numbers on how much CO₂ would be pumped into the atmosphere in Blue nor how much water would be needed.

Ross also said the plant's noise, lighting and traffic impacts would be minimal. He said the noise from the facility would be 85 decibels 10 feet from the door. Eighty-five decibels is considered the maximum safe noise level for humans over an eight hour period.

Ross would not confirm or deny that the Adina/ Blue area is the proposed site for the project. When asked about specifics, Ross stated that it would have four power units generating 1200 megawatts of power and that the generators were two gas and two steam generators. When pressed, Ross said water usage would be minimal and that he was not at liberty to disclose how much water they would need.

Ross declined to answer many questions, saying he could not do so because the company is still preparing its application for a state air emissions permit.

Attendees complained that Ross would not explain why SLE could not build the plant at the old Alcoa industrial facility. Many people were fired because the planning and placement of the proposed project was done without any public input. SLE made the plans for the power plant and secured the land with no transparency as to what they were planning.

Residents spoke out loudly against the power plant, demanding that it be built at the site of the old Alcoa smelter, with the public arguing that the infrastructure was already in place to accommodate such a large endeavor. The response from Ross was that SLE was tapping into the just completed up Matterhorn Pipeline, which is roughly two miles from the proposed power plant, minimizing other infrastructure built outside the SLE property.

Brown said, "Blue residents spoke out with a loud and unified voice at the meeting. We demand Sandow Lakes Energy build this gas plant at the old Alcoa smelter and coal plant site in Milam County. Not in the Blue community. Our elected officials should insist Sandow Lakes Electric take steps to make sure that happens. Let rural Blue remain rural. Don't turn it into an industrial area."

"The most important thing right now is for our elected officials to stand up for their constituents in Blue," Brown said. "We need them to publicly oppose putting this plant in our community."

He said State Senator Louis Kolkhorst recently spoke out against a proposed wind farm in Fayette County, quoting her as saying, "This wind farm will have long term impacts to some of the most beautiful lands in Fayette County and could have negative financial impact to surrounding landowners due to potential property devaluation." Mr. Brown added that Kolkhorst's statement could be changed to Lee County and have the same impact. Brown told the crowd that if Kolkhorst was going to publicly oppose the wind farm, she should do the same for the proposed gas plant. Kolkhorst was invited to Wednesday's meeting, but she did not attend, nor did she have a representative there.

Lee County Judge Frank Malinak III told the crowd that the county had little authority to stop the plant. But Brown said that if the county passed a resolution opposing the plant in Blue, that action could have an impact on whether the Public Utility Commission approves Sandow Lakes Energy's application on Texas Energy Fund dollars. He encouraged Lee Countians to contact their representatives and let them know it is not wanted in Blue and urged them to oppose the construction.

Near the end of the meeting Judge Malinak spoke about the reclamation of the area around the Alcoa lakes and said that if they were to keep to their word, then trees should be transplanted as part of the reclamation of the land. He also said his opinion is that SLE didn't want the power plant at the old Alcoa site because Sandow Lakes Ranch wanted to make the lakes on the property a Woodlands style Riverwalk area.

Also in attendance was Sarah Ceraldi, a staffer for State Rep. Stan Gerdes.

The residents of Blue left feeling more betrayed by another large corporation that through their lack of transparency showed they didn't care for the residents or their well-being.