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County says natural gas power plant should move ***Keep facility in Lee County, but find another spot***

It appears the county commissioner's court and Move the Gas Plant community action group may have reached an agreement about the 1200-megawatt natural gas power plant slated to be built in Blue.

During a meeting on Monday, the court voted to table MTGP's resolution and work with its members to hammer out a version less restrictive.

In short, MTGP had submitted a resolution to County Judge Frank Malinak months ago asking the court to back their position that the plant should be built at the old Alcoa power plant site, and not in the peaceful rural community of Blue.

MTGP's resolution further stated that if SLE could not relocate the plant, then it should abandon the project.

Judge Malinak came under heavy fire from MTGP for not immediately endorsing the resolution, nor bringing it to the commissioners court at an earlier date.

Even though that date finally came on Monday, it turned out that all four commissioners agreed with the judge's position that the resolution was not reasonable. Malinak made it clear that he does not support the power plant being built in Blue. However, one-third of Sandow Lakes Ranch's 33,000 acres lies within Lee County. Because the county has no legal authority to stop the plant from being built, he believed the best compromise is to convince

Sandow Lakes Energy to relocate the plant in a more remote area of their land in Lee County. The judge and commissioners argued that Lee County would be hurt if the plant was moved just across the county line, which would allow Milam County

to reap the benefits of \$5 million in tax revenues the plant will purportedly generate, while Lee County's roads get torn up in the process. "If there is pollution and noise, we still get that," Malinak said.

"My point initially was, we don't want the plant where they want to put it," he said. "Let's put it further down the road, away from the houses, but so that we at least get some tax revenue out of it. But we got criticized for trying to do an investigation and for hiring a consultant."

Too specific

After over an hour of public comments were heard both in opposition and in favor of the plant, the judge asked commissioners for their input.

I do not think they're going to move back to Rockdale," said Commissioner Alan Turner, in whose precinct the plant would likely be built. "I think asking them to do that is being too specific.

I think we can work something out. That's why I can't support this resolution, for that one reason -- it's not reasonable. If that makes somebody mad, well, I'll pray about it tonight."

Turner said that no matter where the plant goes, it is still going to affect somebody.

Better place

Commissioner Richard Wagner said, "As the judge was saying, the resolution says to move it back to Alcoa land. I'd rather see as being moved inward (into Lee County), myself."

Commissioner Mark Matthijetz also agreed the resolution restricted the relocation to Rockdale, and referenced a deed restriction that prevents Sandow Lakes Energy from building a power plant on the old Alcoa site. Matthijetz said there is a wide spot within Lee County where the plant could be built. "I did look at the map," he said. "It's a good spot, and it would

be away from other people. I do not want to affect someone, but to ask them to move it far into Milam County -- or maybe close to Milam County -- may not be feasible due to the cost of moving the gas line.”

Deed restriction

Commissioner Steven Knobloch had obtained a copy of the deed related to the sale of the old Alcoa power plant site. “This is a restriction that the previous owner put in a deed for the new owner to abide by,” he explained. “It states the property will not be used for commercial production, Commercial generation, commercial storage, electricity in any form, nor will it be used for a city of [sic] a commercial power station or energy storage facility.”

Knobloch noted the statement pertains to only about 1,000 acres of Sandow Lakes Ranch. “This document right here is for the Alcoa industrial -- everybody knows where that old site is,” he added. “From what I understand, these restrictions are apparently not in Lee County.”

Knobloch concluded that he could not support the resolution as it is currently written. “It says it’s better to go out there at that Alcoa industrial site,” he noted. “I know it cannot go there, because I have the document that says that it can’t.”

Compromise

In the end, Commissioner Turner made a motion to table the proposed resolution until members of the commissioners court can meet with Move the Gas Plant to amend it. The language would be modified to allow the plant to be moved someplace else within the county.

The motion, which was seconded by Commissioner Knobloch, specifies the court representatives will be Commissioner Turner and Judge Malinak, and that MTGP would select two representatives out of their group. Members of

MTGP who packed the court chambers appeared to be agreeable with the solution.

Marching orders

Judge Malinak then directly addressed Shea Pearson, who had been hired to represent Sandow Lakes Energy, and had been present during the court meeting. “We would like you to take this back to SLR and say, ‘look, the community does not want this plant right there, in that location,’” said Malinak.

“There are better places for it. As county judge, I’m not saying move all the way back to Alcoa. I’m saying there are places in Lee County you could put it.”

“Yes, we would like the tax benefits,” Malinak told Pearson. “Something else we want is assurances on these tax benefits -- that if there are tax benefits, and that those are going to continue, that there’s not somebody in the background trying to find a loophole to prevent us from even gaining them. Because then there would be no benefit for this county whatsoever. So if you will address those issues for us, I would appreciate it.”