

THE LEXINGTON LEADER

Sadow Lakes a Thorn in the Side of Commissioners

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The Lee County Commissioners' Court started their regular meeting Monday by getting some of the regular business of the county done. Jim Hanks of HESCO, LLC gave an update on the progress of the courthouse, stating there was an issue with the gypsum plaster on the third floor that was resolved after testing. A decision to replanting the trees around the courthouse was put on hold until this time next year, giving the ground time to settle after construction.

The Lee County Appraisal District filled the position on the board formally held by the late Mike Organ, naming David Legere to fill that vacancy. Amendments to the Lee County subdivision regulations were approved, requiring lots to be a minimum of two acres and if the lot is within ½ mile of rural water then the owners have to have rural water to the property. Along the lines of permits, the county road entrance application process was amended to clarify size and placement of culverts.

The big item of the day was the discussion of the Sadow Lakes Ranch power plant. This has been a bone of contention within the county since the plans to build was first announced. Representatives from Move the Gas Plant stated in their argument that they would like to see the plant moved farther into Sadow Lakes Ranch (SLR) property, away from the more populated areas of Blue and Adina. They stated clearly that they are not against the building of the power plant, just where it is located. In their resolution, Move the Gas Plant (MTGP) asked that SLR look at alternative sites and located three sites that they felt were more suited. In asking SLR to move, they stated that if they could not find an economically feasible way to move the plant that the project be abandoned altogether.

On the other side of the aisle Powering Lee County's Future (PLCF) stated that it took 1 ½ years of planning for the plant and if they were to move it they would go to Milam County depriving Lee County of the tax revenue.

On the side of the county, Steve Hagel came in to explain his research on the power plant. Mr. Hagel has 31 years with TCEQ and knows how the organization works from the inside. He explained that TCEQ only looks at the air quality considerations and not where it is located. If the TCEQ determines that the power plant meets with the required standards, TCEQ has three options concerning it: approve, approve with changes, or deny the permit. Mr. Hagel stated that TCEQ is bound by state laws to review the permit request and make a decision based on what is determined. This prompted commissioners to argue that any resolution they make or any opposition pointed toward TCEQ would not be addressed and may be ignored. Mr. Hagel said that it would be looked at as a way to express the opposition, but to get TCEQ to halt any production would have to be done in the courts.

The commissioners then talked about the tax revenue and how a project had as an example cost 1.4 billion to complete yet when the project was appraised the value would be substantially lower meaning less tax revenue. A few other examples were cited saying a project cost one million dollars to build yet was appraised for taxes at half a million. Then the talk went to money, Alan Turner spoke up in his straight forward way and said it was all about the money and that with this power plant data centers will be built to be powered by it and less of the energy will go to the county. He is not happy that he has to work with SLR since it is in his precinct and he has no choice, but he said he would feel better about SLR if they were good neighbors. He implied that to this day they have not been. He said the county doesn't find out any of SLR's plans until after it is done and in process. Lee County Judge Frank Malinak III spoke up, saying it is going in. "We have to face that reality and that this issue has split the county and caused a lot of hard feelings within the residents of the county. Healthy debate on an issue is good, but not coming to any consensus only tears everything apart."

Judge Malinak continued saying, "When we toured the gas plant in Temple a few months ago, it was magnificent! It was like a space age NASA control room, a highly sophisticated technology computerized operation. I believe if we can get the gas plant in Lee County, it is going to be a major positive installation for the school districts, and especially for Lexington, because of the tax funds, but also because I believe this operation is going to be a destination for kids' science classes and anyone interested in science and technology. Hopefully, when our kids go through and tour this plant or a plant like this, it will inspire them to consider working at a place like this. It is fantastic how they are producing electricity with natural gas like they are. Maybe we can inspire our kids to be the next generation of scientists and engineers from right here in Lee County!"

The Judge ended his comments, asking that people on both sides work together in a positive manner.

The Court passed a Resolution saying, "Be it resolved that the Commissioners' Court hereby recognizes the economic and infrastructure benefits that the Sandow Lakes Energy natural gas power plant will bring to the County, but requests Sandow Lakes Energy to consider economically feasible alternative locations within Sandow Lakes Ranch, but farther away from residential properties in the Blue/Adina community and within Lee County for its proposed natural gas power plant."