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For Immediate Release

Contact: Travis Brown 512-560-0341 travisbrown983@gmail.com

‘Move the Gas Plant’ Challenges Credibility Of Claims by “Pro-Gas Plant Group”

LEXINGTON, TEXAS – Opponents of a proposed natural gas power plant in Lee County have challenged the credibility of a group that claims to represent supporters of the proposed plant.

An article in the May 22 edition of the *Giddings Times & News* cited what it called “a slew” of comments of support for the gas plant that were filed with the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ). The article named a group called “Allies of Sandow Lakes Energy” as the force behind those letters of support.

Travis Brown, a Blue resident and spokesman for the Move the Gas Plant group, said he had never heard of the “Allies of Sandow Lakes Energy” before reading the *Times & News* article.

Brown suggested the pro-plant group is just a front or shell group created by Sandow Lakes Ranch (SLR), based on the official record of public comments to TCEQ referenced in the article. SLR is an affiliate of Sandow Lakes Energy, the builder of the proposed gas plant.

He noted the “slew” of letters of support for the plant totaled sixteen, with at least eleven of those being submitted to the TCEQ by SLR in two batches. Of the

sixteen, four were letters of “non-objection” to the project. Two of the sixteen were submitted by the same person, but with two different addresses.

By contrast, more than 80 letters in opposition to the gas plant were submitted to the TCEQ.

Brown also pointed out that during the public meeting held by the TCEQ April 24 in Lexington, no one spoke in favor of the plant while more than a dozen of the 80 or so attendees spoke against it.

Brown also said almost all of the letters of support or non-opposition appear to be based on a form letter likely drafted by Sandow Lakes.

He said it appears only three people who live in the Blue community submitted letters of support for the gas plant or “non-opposition” to it. And some of the 16 letters came from individuals who work for SLR or have other apparent conflicts of interest, Brown said.

For example, one letter of support came from Kayla Schnell, who works for Sandow Lakes Ranch as a business systems and communications associate. However, she did not disclose that fact in her letter of support. Schnell is the county’s former permitting director and executive assistant to County Judge Frank Malinak. She left the county last fall to take the job with Sandow Lakes Ranch.

Another letter, one that expressed “non-opposition” to the plant, came from Danny Wilhite, identified in the article as an elder with the Adina Christian Church, which is located near the proposed plant site.

Brown said Wilhite works at Sandow Lakes Ranch, but did not disclose that or his affiliation with Adina Christian Church, in his TCEQ comment.

In some cases, those letters of support or non-opposition came from individuals representing groups that have received economic benefits from SLR, Brown said.

Rick Isaacks, chief of the Blue Volunteer Fire Department, submitted a comment saying he did not oppose the gas plant. Brown pointed out that recently a photo of Isaacks, along with Schnell and another Sandow Lakes representative,

appeared in the *Lexington Leader*. The two were presenting Isaacks with a \$2,000 donation by Sandow Lakes Ranch to the fire department. Isaacks' comment to TCEQ did not reference his BVFD affiliation.

Brown said another letter expressing no objection to the gas plant was apparently submitted twice by SLR. The letters were identical except for listing two different addresses for the author, Blaize Morgan, representing Teen Rescue, the operator of the River View Christian Academy school/home for troubled girls near the proposed gas plant site.

"Sandow Lakes Ranch folks have had conversations with the girls' school," Brown said. "We would not be surprised if there were some promises made to them."

The Giddings article also cited a letter submitted by Judge Malinak saying he personally did not oppose the gas plant being built in the Blue community.

However, the Lee County Commissioners Court in February unanimously adopted an official resolution that asked Sandow Lakes Energy to consider moving the proposed gas plant from the Blue community to a site farther within the 33,000-acre Sandow Lakes Ranch and farther from any nearby residences.

Maps in the company's application for an air permit show almost 100 homes located within a mile and a half of the proposed site, which is at the intersection of CR 309 and CR 312.

Brown said it was "disingenuous but not too surprising" that Malinak submitted his letter of non-objection to the gas plant, despite his vote for the resolution opposing it being built in the Blue community.

"Judge Malinak is of course free to comment as a private citizen," Brown said. "But it appears to us that the judge prefers placating the Sandow Lakes company instead of standing up for his constituents in the Blue community."

Brown said that in addition to expressing his personal opinion, Malinak should also have reported to TCEQ the county's resolution requesting SLR to move the plant.

Brown questioned the validity of some of the claims in the letters of support or non-opposition to the gas plant. Several of those letters praised the company's "transparency" in dealing with the public.

"That certainly has not been the case in our community's dealings with the company," Brown said. "And our own county commissioner stated publicly during a court meeting that the Sandow Lakes people have not been forthcoming, to say the least, about their plans."

Many of the support letters stated air pollution from the gas plant would not harm human health and that those emissions would meet state and federal regulations.

"We strongly disagree," Brown said. "An analysis of the company's air permit application by our expert found many deficiencies and problems, including the failure of the company to demonstrate emissions from the plant would be protective of human health."

Also, according to the American Lung Association, air pollution from natural gas power plants can cause respiratory diseases, cardiovascular problems, lung cancer and premature death in nearby communities. They can also worsen asthma, especially in children and the elderly, according to the ALA.

Many of the support letters cited the need for the gas plant to provide more electricity to the state's grid.

However, Brown pointed out that a TCEQ document analyzing the Sandow Lakes Energy application states that no more than 80 megawatts of the 1,200 megawatts that would be generated by the power plant would ever go to the state's power grid.

The TCEQ document states, "SL Energy has stated that electricity will be sold to the state electric grid, with about 80 MW sold to the public during ERCOT system peak periods. Electricity will continue to be sold to the public until all of the private customers have completed projects slated to accept the power generated by these two turbines."

“What that means is very little, if any, of the power from the plant would go to shore up the state’s electricity grid,” Brown said. “Instead, it will go to the Bitcoin mining operations and other industrial facilities at Sadow Lakes Ranch.”

As far as economic benefits to the county go, Brown said Malinak, Precinct Three Commissioner Alan Turner and other county officials have publicly expressed skepticism that the county would ever see significant new property taxes from the power plant.

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