

San Pat residents speak out against Exxon proposal

Chris Ramirez, Corpus Christi Caller-Times Published 7:10 a.m. CT Dec. 19, 2016 | Updated 6:30 p.m. CT Dec. 19, 2016



(Photo: Caller-Times archive)

SINTON — Years of night school paid off for Stacey Rivere.

Earning her masters degree meant she could earn and save the money she needed to buy the home in Gregory she wanted, with only the yipping of birds and coastal animals occasionally breaking the silence.

She didn't consider Exxon Mobil might build the world's largest steam cracking plant less than a mile away.

Rivere was among residents who pleaded Monday, Dec. 19, 2016, with the San Patricio County Commissioners Court to vote down incentives for the yet-to-be-approved project.

"We wanted quiet. We wanted (to hear) nothing out there," said Rivere, who moved with her husband to the area from Portland three years ago. "Exxon's not going to be able to guarantee that I'll be able to continue to listen to nothing."

In July, the petroleum giant announced San Patricio County was one of three communities being scouted for the facility somewhere on the U.S. Gulf Coast. It intends to build the plant as part of a joint effort with Saudi Arabia Basic Industries Corp., a Riyadh-based petrochemical company.

The property Exxon-Mobil is eyeing is in an unincorporated parcel north of Portland.

Discussion on the prospect was not on the commissioners' agenda Monday. Residents, many from Portland and Gregory, made their statements during a public comment period of the meeting, when commissioners were prohibited from responding or taking action.

They voiced concerns the area already is saturated with industry. Exxon's facility, they said, could pose health and environmental risks to neighborhoods.

"We're going to trade money and jobs over quality of life," said Tim Flynn, whose family has farmed near Gregory for more than 100 years.

The company has an option on the property, but has not yet filed the paperwork to do so, said County Judge Terry A. Simpson, who supports the project. More than 1,300 people have signed an online by the grassroots Portland Citizens United petition opposing the project, said Troy Snody, who heads the group. Portland Citizens United is planning an advertising campaign aimed at informing county residents about Exxon's plans.

The operating area of the plant, if approved, would be in the center of the property; there would be a half-mile buffer between the operating area and the south edge of the property, and a .88-mile buffer between the operating area and the east edge of the property.

The plant, which would produce different kinds of plastic, would create roughly 400 permanent jobs and about 11,000 construction jobs. Construction would last about five years.

Victoria and St. James Parish, Louisiana, also are in the running.

Rivere said she isn't against Exxon doing business, but that opening such a facility so close to homes and schools would upend quality life in Gregory and Portland. She also was concerned about added pollution, man camps dotting the landscape and heavier industrial traffic on Farm-to-Market Road 2986, an already busy two-lane road.

"It's going to have 11,000 contractors. We know something is going to happen," she said. "We just don't know when."

The facility would be expected to be capable of producing 1.8 million tons per year of ethylene and would feed a monoethylene glycol plant and two polyethylene plants.

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Monoethylene glycol can be used to make polyester for clothing and polyethylene terephthalate for beverage bottles and containers. Polyethylene has a range of applications, including packaging, consumer and industrial products, agricultural film, and building and construction materials.

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