

County commissioner wants resolution against Bull Hide Creek sewer plant lifted

By J.B. Smith Tribune-Herald staff writer

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A McLennan County commissioner is aiming to repeal a county resolution against the Bull Hide Creek wastewater treatment plant and get started planning a county park adjacent to it.

Opponents to the plant and the group of cities that proposed it inked a settlement this week that would allow the plant near Lorena to move forward with the promise of environmental and aesthetic safeguards.

A neighborhood group and the nearby Levi Water Supply Corp. were scheduled this month to challenge the Waco Metropolitan Area Regional Sewer System over the plant in a state-contested hearing in Austin. McLennan County commissioners sided with the opponents in June, passing a nonbinding resolution condemning the plan.

This month, the parties reached a settlement that requires the cities to minimize the plant's noise and light, pay for in-stream water monitoring, construct a wetland to retain and purify treated effluent water and place deed restrictions on the 230-acre tract.

Both sides will present the settlement this week to the State Office of Administrative Hearings and ask that the case be returned to the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality for approval.

Precinct 1 County Commissioner Kelly Snell, who represents the Bull Hide Creek area and voted for the resolution against the plant, helped negotiate the settlement. Now he plans to bring a resolution in favor of the plant to commissioners Oct. 20.

"We'll put a resolution in support of Bull Hide Creek on the agenda due to the concessions that were made to help the environment," he said. "I represent the Bull Hide people, but also Robinson, Lorena, part of Hewitt and Waco, and we've got to work to a mutual agreement."

Snell said the promised deed restrictions, which ensure the 200 acres of unused land will be used for agriculture, parkland, green space or housing, will quell fears that it would be used for a trash dump.

Snell said he will push for a 40-acre park at the site that would offer baseball, softball and football fields and possibly a fishing pond. He said he will seek grants to fund the project, which would serve Robinson, Lorena, Moody and Bruceville-Eddy.

"There's not a lot of things for kids to do in this part of the county," he said. "Now that we've secured the land, we can start to work on grants."

Under the agreement, the cities agreed to provide effluent, or treated wastewater, to irrigate any ballfields that might be built at the site. Between the irrigation and possible other effluent reuse in the area, Snell said the treatment plant may ultimately discharge little into Bull Hide Creek.

The wastewater treatment plant, permitted for 1.5 million gallons per day, would serve Lorena and Hewitt and would help relieve strains on both cities' systems. Lorena has been under a development moratorium for several years because of its inadequate sewer plant.

"Once this thing goes on line and the moratorium is lifted, Lorena can start having development again," Lorena interim City Manager Gary Whittle said.

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