

McLennan County Commissioners Court officially declares support for Bull Hide Creek sewer plant

By Regina Dennis Tribune-Herald staff writer

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Four months after siding with residents opposed to a new wastewater treatment plant in the Bull Hide Creek area, the McLennan County Commissioners Court officially declared its support for the project Tuesday.

The court unanimously approved a new resolution supporting the creation of the wastewater plant. The reversal in position comes on the heels of concessions by the Waco Metropolitan Area Regional Sewer System to implement initiatives that will minimize the environmental impact of the plant in the Bull Hide Creek area.

“This is going to be a whole lot better for the environment now because there will be measures in place to protect the water supply in the creek where there were none before,” said Commissioner Kelly Snell, who sponsored the resolution.

WMARSS purchased the 230-acre tract of land in 2008 to build a sewage plant that would treat up to 1.5 million gallons of wastewater daily and replace an outdated plant in Lorena.

However, the plan was met with skepticism and outrage by a local group of residents and Levi Water Supply Corp., which has a well stationed 150 feet from the creek’s bottom, about the potential for water contamination.

In the agreement, WMARSS pledged to construct a wetland that would hold three days of treated effluent before it is discharged into Bull Hide Creek, creating a buffer to prevent contamination.

WMARSS also will pay for stream monitoring at three places in the creek to track water quality; minimize noise, light, odor and sludge handling at the plant; and file deed restrictions limiting use of the 200 acres of unused land on the property to agricultural, parkland, green space or residential use. Waco City Manager Larry Groth said the additional requirements should cost about \$50,000, excluding the cost of the wetland, which has not been estimated.

The court also rescinded the original resolution passed June 30 opposing the plant, which also had been sponsored by Snell. Snell said he does not think the court acted hastily in approving the original resolution because talks between WMARSS and the Bull Hide Creek residents had come to a standstill with no agreeable solution for both parties.

“If we hadn’t passed that resolution, this agreement would have never been reached,” Snell said. “The residents had tried to reach some type of agreement with WMARSS without any success, and it wasn’t until we passed that resolution that the city wanted to do some serious negotiations.”

Commissioner Joe Mashek, who voted for the original resolution opposing the plant, said the dispute over the new wastewater plant mirrors the debate over the proposed creation of two new coal plants in McLennan County in 2007.

City and county officials and state Rep. Kip Averitt, R-Waco, spoke out against the plants until the plan ultimately was scrapped.

“After what we went through a few years ago with coal plants, fighting the coal plants here, I’m really pleased to have the city of Waco be cooperative and take the extra steps, even if it will cost a little more money, to help protect the environment,” Mashek said.

Staff writer J.B. Smith contributed to this story.

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