

# Big stink raised in Lorena over planned wastewater plant

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LORENA — Fireworks erupted Thursday night at an informational meeting between area officials planning to build a small wastewater treatment plant near here and mostly rural residents opposed to one in the unincorporated area beyond city limits.

Fears about water quality and wear and tear on county roads figured into the complaints.

The planned Bull Hide Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant, to be built on what city officials say is 232 acres of undeveloped land about 2.5 miles northeast of Lorena, would relieve the load on the Waco Metropolitan Area Regional Sewerage System (WMARSS), which has neared capacity in recent years.

When finished, the \$15 million plant — located near Losak Road and Rosenthal Parkway — will treat 1.5 million gallons of water a day. Water officials say the treated water discharged from the plant will be of the same quality as that in Bull Hide Creek.

The newly constructed plant will also allow the city of Lorena to lift a moratorium on new construction inside city limits.

“We are not putting this here because Lorena’s system is in trouble,” system board chairman and Waco Assistant City Manager Wiley Stem said. “We are putting this here because Lorena is at capacity and so is the rest of the WMARSS system.”

None of this reassured between 60 and 75 area residents attending the meeting, some of whom complained of being uninformed about the plant.

“You talk about all this stuff, but you didn’t take into consideration the people out here before you bought the land,” said Carolyn Kline, who has lived in the area more than 30 years. Kline owns a machine shop adjacent to the land where the plant will sit.

Frustrated homeowners attending the meeting at Lorena High School aired concerns about everything from the plant's possible smell to the stress on county roadways and the condition of treated water sent downstream from the plant.

LaDonna Young, Kline's daughter and a resident along Rosenthal Parkway, said homeowners are angry with the plans because the area is unincorporated and residents there use septic tanks — and thus would gain no benefit from a wastewater plant.

Six sites were studied for the plant with the final location being selected because it was the "most suitable location available," said Jack Stowe, senior director of RW Black, which is managing the expansion program for the seven-city regional sewerage system.

Waco Metropolitan Area Regional Sewerage System officials said they were building in the area because it's large enough to allow "sufficient buffer" from existing residences, with treelines shielding the plant from general view.

Although the acreage is large, the plant will occupy only about 30 to 50 acres, they said.

Leftover "sludge" will be pumped into holding tanks and trucked to the city of Waco's main wastewater treatment plant for processing, Stowe said.

The proposed plant awaits a final permit from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality. System officials say they anticipate beginning design of the plant within the next three or four months, with construction likely to begin in early 2009.

Last year while appealing for federal funding for the project, Waco City Manager Larry Groth told a subcommittee of the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources that the project was a critical part of Waco-area cities' plans to maximize their existing water supplies.

Federal funding for the project has yet to gain approval.

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