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Abita Springs • Barke

Residents upset over LA 25 waste transfer site

by Polly H. Greene

Construction of a non-processing waste transfer station north of Covington on Louisiana 25 has nearby residents organizing to protest the facility.

Kit Friedrichs-Baumann, who lives on River Road, has talked to parish officials about the residents' concerns and is now seeking help from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality.

The waste transfer station is being constructed on a 32,000 square-foot parcel that is part of a 25-acre industrial park being developed by Chris Jean of Slidell. The property, which is zoned M-2 industrial, is on the east side of LA 25, north of Hard Hat Road.

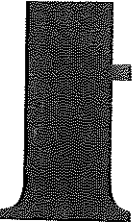
A conditional use permit for the waste facility, referred to as a "pick-up station" in the application, was granted to Jean's company, South East Investments, by the parish Zoning Commission in 2006 and extended last January.

According to Suzanne Parsons Stymiest, spokesperson for parish government, when the original permit was issued, Jean said garbage would be delivered to the site and placed in large containers that would eventually be transferred to a processing facility.

The entire industrial park came under fire last February, when parish officials learned that Jean had cleared the entire property, including what should have been 25-foot buffers along LA 25 and the rear of the

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property. Though Jean could have been fined \$500 plus administrative cost, parish officials instead got him to agree to plant cypress and oak trees in the buffer areas as well as the interior of the property.

That incident also prompted the adoption of an amendment to the parish ordinance regulating commercial and residential developments that tightened procedures for obtaining a land clearing permit.

The latest controversy is directed at the non-processing waste transfer station.

Friedrichs-Baumann said she and nearby residents learned in late July that a transfer station would be located on the property. In her letter to Cheryl Nolan, assistant secretary of the state DEQ, Friedrichs-Baumann wrote that there was a high degree of community opposition to the business, which she claims will eventually be converted to an onsite waste processing center.

"Based on current plot plans and discussions with construction personnel, it is apparent that the transfer station is intended to become a processing facility," Friedrichs-Baumann wrote in her letter. "Drawings submitted to support the site's zoning change and conditional use permit clearly identify a recycling center to be constructed at the site. It is apparent that

the developer is representing the facility as a non-processing transfer station to circumvent the requirement to pursue a permit under the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality's current regulations, thereby completely avoiding public participation until the site is fully developed."

Friedrichs-Baumann also notes concerns about the site's proximity to the Bogue Falaya River, residential areas along River Road, and St. Joseph Abbey and Seminary College, which now houses Archbishop Hannan High School.

She also cites Jean's background regarding environmental compliance. "The developer, South East Investments, LLC, appears to be associated with CJS Environmental Services (CES) and Coastal Waste Services (CWS). In 2006, CJS pleaded guilty to violating the Clean Water Act, resulting in a half million-dollar fine and the company being placed on three-year probation," Friedrichs-Baumann wrote.

According to parish records, the Zoning Commission issued a conditional use permit for the pickup station in November 2006. Stymiest said the minutes from that meeting indicate that staff of the Planning Department recommended the request be tabled, but it was approved

because no one from the audience expressed opposition to the project.

The permit was reissued in January 2008. Neither request was reviewed by the Parish Council, because parish procedures require council consideration only when a formal appeal is filed.

Friedrichs-Baumann also claims in a letter written to residents living near the site that the parish code enforcement office on July 21 issued a cease and desist order for work on the transfer station, because "the company had failed to complete some requirements of their conditional use permit."

However, parish officials said last week that all work being done at the site is legal and properly permitted.

Stymiest said that as the developers move forward with construction of the waste transfer facility, they will undergo further scrutiny and be required to meet current building regulations and codes.

Friedrichs-Baumann said she will continue to ask questions about the facility and plans to ask for a meeting where area residents can discuss the issue with Jean and parish officials.

No date for the meeting has been set. In the meantime, she is asking state DEQ officials to look into the facility.

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