

## Dispute about waste station stoked

### New push for permit riles up project's foes

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A Fort Worth, Texas, company whose construction of a controversial solid-waste transfer station was halted by a citizens lawsuit is seeking another zoning permit to build and operate the facility north of Covington.

IESI, one of the nation's largest solid-waste companies, will ask the St. Tammany Parish Zoning Commission on Dec. 2 to approve a conditional-use permit for the facility planned for 11 acres in an industrial park along Louisiana 25, just north of Hard Hat Drive.

Unlike both two years ago and 10 months ago, when a permit for the station was approved and then later extended by the commission without opposition, scores of residents are expected to storm the 6 p.m. commission meeting in protest.

"We will be there in force," said Kit Friedrichs-Baumann, who heads the citizens' effort to stop the project. "We will be there to say our piece."

The meeting will be held in the Parish Council chambers of the parish government complex on Koop Drive north of Mandeville.

Jeff Schoen, attorney for IESI, said the permit being sought is almost identical to the one previously approved by the commission in November 2006 and extended on Feb. 6 of this year.

"I believe we have met all of the legal requirements of the parish and state to operate this facility," Schoen said. And although the commission has discretionary authority, "we're hopeful that the Zoning Commission will use its discretion to grant this permit."

The original permit was issued to Southeast Investments, a company headed by Slidell businessman Chris Jean. But land records showed that Southeast Investments sold the 11-acre site for the transfer station to another company owned by Jean which then sold the site to IESI on Dec. 27, 2007 -- more than a month before a permit extension was granted to Southeast Investments.

IESI also acquired a regional garbage company, Coastal Waste Services, from Jean and wants to build the transfer station for the use of Coastal Waste garbage trucks that serve western St. Tammany.

In August, IESI got a parish building permit and began constructing the station. But through the North West St. Tammany Civic Association, residents sued to stop the project.

And on Oct. 1, state Judge Peter Garcia voided the zoning permit and parish building and operating permits issued for the facility. Garcia agreed with the plaintiffs that a condition required for the zoning permit -- a traffic study -- was illegally waived by the parish engineering department.

The judge also ruled that the zoning permit was void because Southeast Investments no longer owned the 11-acre site when the commission granted the extension.

The case has been appealed by the parish, IESI and companies owned by Jean.

The traffic study has been done and submitted to the parish, Schoen said. It shows that the transfer station will not hinder traffic along Louisiana 25, he said.

Opponents of the project say they were unaware that the permit for the facility was under consideration by the commission in 2006 and early this year. They say they only learned about the project as construction was about to begin.

"We hope the Zoning Commission looks at this with fresh eyes and an open mind," Friedrichs-Baumann said. "The permit should never have been approved to begin with. We're not against growth, but this is not the right place for this facility."

Cary King, a resident of Thompson Road north of the site, stated in a letter to parish officials: "If this monstrosity is built, it will increase traffic to the area, reduce our quality of life, destroy our property values and would be, frankly, completely incompatible with the surrounding area."

"That sums it up in a nutshell," Friedrichs-Baumann said.

Officials from IESI say they will be good neighbors and that residents won't even know that the facility is there. At a pickup station, garbage trucks would drive up a ramp inside a closed building to dump their loads onto larger trucks for disposal outside the parish. Schoen said the company plans to use the facility only for the six Coastal Waste trucks that work the area.

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