

Caldwell County residents hope to use landfill ban to stop proposed facility

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By Farzad Mashhood - American-Statesman Staff

LOCKHART —

Caldwell officials passed a countywide ban on landfills Monday, though they acknowledged the measure likely comes too late to block the plans already in the works for a 250-acre landfill five miles north of Lockhart.

“The county is not going to use the ordinance to fight the landfill. The county is outfitting itself so we don’t have to do this again,” said Commissioner Joe Roland, whose precinct includes the proposed landfill site near Texas 130 and FM 1185, owned by Green Group Holdings. He suggested the law to block any future landfills except on an 18-acre former gravel pit south of Lockhart.

Still, some residents opposed to the Green Group Holdings’ site hope to use this new law in the upcoming legal battle.

Several dozen residents, many with signs declaring “Bump the Dump,” packed into the commissioners meeting room Monday morning, with standing room only by the time the public hearing began.

“I think this is the worst kind of economic development we can have,” Lockhart resident Leslie Banks said. “If you approve this ordinance today, 30 to 40 years from now ... I don’t think anyone will look back and say, ‘gosh, I just wish we had built that dump.’”

After hearing from about 18 residents during an hour-long public hearing, all of whom said they supported the law and opposed the landfill, commissioners met briefly in a closed session before approving the law.

Several representatives from Georgia-based Green Group Holdings attending the hearing, but did not address commissioners.

“We decided not to participate in the public hearing based on the fact that this ordinance does not apply to our facility because we have an application pending before the (Texas Commission on Environmental Quality),” David Green, a vice president with Green Group Holdings, told the American-Statesman.



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The facility has begun filing permit applications with the environmental agency under the company name 130 Environmental Park LLC. With the permit process underway, the landfill is exempt from new laws prohibiting them, Green said.

But the company has only filed two of the four parts of the permit application, so the process hasn't begun making the facility not exempt from the county law, argued James Abshier, who chairs Environmental Protection in the Interest of Caldwell County, a local group organized to oppose the landfill.

"This is probably an issue for the courts to decide," Abshier said.

Waller County, where Green Group Holdings is also trying to permit another controversial landfill called Pintail, passed a similar law, but commissioners voted to remove the restrictions on the Pintail site in February, the Houston Chronicle reported.

The company announced plans in September for the Caldwell County landfill, which would be built on a grassy cattle ranch where ducks swim in a nearby reservoir. The site, about 30 minutes from downtown Austin, would hold 25 million tons of trash, almost 200 times what the city of Austin's trash trucks collected in 2012. Company president Ernest Kaufmann said the facility, estimated to cost \$30 million to \$35 million, is needed to serve the growing metro area.

The site has little groundwater and deep clay soil, which provides a natural liner in addition to the thick plastic landfill liner that would be installed to keep contaminants from seeping into the ground, he said. The company also plans to design a landfill that exceeds the state requirements for groundwater monitoring and has extra drainage in the event of a large flood.

But Abshier, other local residents and the Texas Campaign for the Environment don't think it's a good site for the landfill. The prolific Carrizo-Wilcox Aquifer is just outside the proposed landfill's footprint, and the liner to keep water from seeping into the ground won't be thick enough, opponents said Monday. Trash-contaminated water seeping from the landfill then could flow from the primarily sand-based aquifer to the nearby Carrizo-Wilcox, Abshier said.