



## conroe courier – news

### Oak Ridge North discusses plans for water tower

By Lauren Hodges

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Oak Ridge North – Some residents voiced opposition during a City Council meeting Monday to a proposed \$3.5 million water tower in Oak Ridge North's Oak Ridge Grove neighborhood.

Plans call for a 500,000-gallon water tank that would tap into the Jasper Aquifer. It would be owned and operated by the Southern Montgomery County Municipal Utility District on a parcel owned by the city.

The well would provide water for the area of Oak Hill North, in the district of Oak Grove, the new commerce park area and some of the county's eastern district. The tower would be 52 feet wide and 32 feet high, located 65 feet away from one pipeline and 100 feet from another. Inside the well will be two 150-pound cylinders of chlorine to treat the water.

Some residents who showed up at the meeting voiced concerns about safety and property values. Complaints centered on the presence of pipelines and chlorine tanks. Another concern centered on why trees were cleared from the parcel before the project received final approval from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality.

"We do not discount the fact that we need water and we appreciate that," Rebecca Dalby, of Oak Ridge Grove, said. "After sitting here for an hour and a half I still don't have any confidence that Oak Ridge North is protecting us."

There was conflicting information presented by residents and MUD officials in attendance as to whether or not the TCEQ had approved the plans. Rick Moffatt, general manager for SMCMUD, responding to a question posed by Councilman James Walton, said the project had already received state approval.

That assertion was challenged by several residents, including Oak Ridge North Police Chief Andy Walters, who said he was addressing the city council as a resident and not in an official capacity.

"I did some checking," Walters said. "TCEQ does not have a building plan. On Nov. 6, (SMCMUD) received a mailing from TCEQ denying (their permit request)."

How the water well might affect property values was another key concern for residents who bought homes in the neighborhood developed by Darling Homes.

"I realize you guys spend a lot of time figuring out how we can get water," resident Patricia Icklos said. "Our homes, starting at \$185,000, add something to Oak Ridge North."

The decision to put the well in that area was due in part to its ability to provide water to the needed areas, said Kerry Masson, SMCMUD board president.

Masson, an Oak Ridge North resident who said he has been on the MUD board for 25 years, said the well is necessary and will be safe.

The safety precautions include alarms inside the building in case of a chlorine contamination, he said.

Moffatt said the fuel tanks for the generator will be located in a sound-proof enclosure, and a decision has yet to be made on whether they will use diesel to operate on natural gas.

"The section will be surveyed by geological engineers," Masson said. "It won't be done haphazardly."

Pending state approval, MUD officials said the project could get started in three or four months, and would take 15 months to complete.

Oak Ridge North Mayor Fred O'Connor said resident's questions would be answered and "due diligence" given to their concerns before the council votes on the project.

The next meeting is planned for 7 p.m. on Feb. 23 in the city's Bob Williams Memorial Council Chambers at 27424 Robinson Road.

City swimming pool: The South Montgomery County YMCA will oversee management of the Oak Ridge North municipal swimming pool in Marilyn Edgar Park.

Operating with a one-year contract, the YMCA will take over selling pool passes, collecting and and all fees for daily costs, passes and programs.

Oak Ridge North City Manager Paul Mendes said the city will be able to save the city about \$7,300. Last year, \$61,000 was budgeted for the swimming pool.

Council election: Three city council seats in Oak Ridge North are up for election May 9, including Steve Holcomb's Position 2 seat and Leah Gray's Position 4 and Tony Butler's Position 5 seats.

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