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### SMCMUD to consider moving entrance to proposed well site in ORN

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Oak Ridge North officials are working with the Southern Montgomery County Municipal Utility District to try to modify plans to lessen the impact a planned water well site would have on residents.

The modifications don't go as far as some in the city and the Oak Ridge Grove neighborhood hoped, after the SMCMUD rejected an ORN proposal to move the storage tanks on the site to a piece of property further away from the subdivision.

"We don't have a lot of faith in (the MUD's) good faith," said Randy Demars, a resident whose property abuts the well site.

Kerry Masson, president of the SMCMUD Board, said the situation is simple: growth in South County has necessitated the well.

"Our job is to do the best job we can for the residents. If we don't drill this well we will be rationing, and that's not right," he said.

Masson said there are several reasons the storage tanks could not be moved to another location, like the city had proposed.

SMCMUD, Masson explained, had to get approvals from the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, the city of Oak Ridge North, Houston, its drainage district and the several other agencies -- and had its plans subsequently altered to meet the demands of the different groups -- in order to get to the point they are at right now.

"If we were to move most of the plant ... everything would have to be resubmitted and re-approved," he said.

That would mean the MUD would need to go back through each of those agencies to have them approved, a process that would take six months to a year, Masson said.

On top of the time delay, Masson said altering the plans would carry a tremendous price tag as well, costing "hundreds of thousands of dollars."

That's not to say ORN and SMCMUD isn't looking to see what they can do for the residents of Oak Ridge Grove.

"We have been going and working with them on a weekly basis," said Oak Ridge North Mayor Fred O'Connor.

Among the proposed solutions is the moving of the entrance to the facility from the main entrance to the neighborhood to a nearby street, Oakhurst Drive.

Masson said that change in the plans, which will be voted on by the MUD board at its May meeting, would cost up to \$250,000.

That original plans for the site included the entrance from Oakhurst, but was changed to save the cost of building a bridge over the lower area of the site.

In addition to the relocated entrance, if it is approved by the MUD board, Masson said everything that can be done, will be to minimize the visual impact on Oak Ridge Grove residents.

Masson said only trees that were intended to be removed to construct the well facility have been cut down, allowing enough room for the well and a 500,000 gallon storage tank to be constructed toward the center of the site.

Federally mandated security fences, which have been required since the Sept. 11, 2001 attack on the World Trade Center, will be built as close to the physical building as possible, rather than at the perimeter of the site, he said.

In addition, the MUD will make sure trees and bushes are planted where they can be to further minimize the disruption of the view.

"We'll never be able to hide that whole tank, but the rest of the plant they will not see," Masson said.

A second 500,000 gallon storage tank that is slated for the site, one that would be used by ORN, will not be constructed in the site's first phase. SMCMUD is expected to vote to go out for bids for that construction at its May meeting.

Masson said the amount of water pumped by the municipal utility district for the first three months of this year are 14 year highs, and he said the amount of water pumped during the summer is expected to be about 2 million gallons a day, which is approaching the system's capacity limits.

Under the district's current time line, the site could begin pumping next summer.

"Right now it should take one year to 14 months before water is in the pipes," Masson said.

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