

LNG states case

By KATLYNN LANHAM | Posted: Friday, February 3, 2012 2:00 am

LAKE JACKSON — A Freeport LNG executive leaned over a large map of the company's facilities Thursday, showing Hide-A-Way on the Gulf resident Andrew Ballard locations initially considered for a proposed pretreatment plant.

While Mark Mallett, vice president of operations and engineering for Freeport LNG, spoke to Ballard, a river of people eager to learn about the company's operations flowed around them.

People gathered around the table at Freeport LNG's open house came to find out one thing: why did Freeport LNG select the CR 792 location for its pretreatment plant?

Pointing to the three other sites considered for the facility, Mallett explained, "we worked for months to get a lease, we just can't."

"They said the land is not for sale," Mallett said.

The pretreatment facility must be on the pipeline stretching from the terminal in Quintana to the meter station on CR 227 just off FM 523, he explained. It also has to be on a sizable parcel of land.

The initial list of possible locations was small, but with land owners unwilling to sell or lease their property, it was narrowed to one.

Ballard, however, described the decision as a "corporate black eye" that necessitated further persuasion to the property owners of the other two sites.

"There's got to be a way to move that plant somewhere else," he said.

Thursday's open house was the first since Freeport LNG in November bought the land for the pretreatment plant. Employees and industry experts were available to discuss the plan one-on-one with residents.

Freeport LNG officials announced the expansion of the terminal on Quintana Island in late 2010. They plan to construct facilities to liquefy natural gas for export to overseas markets in the form of liquefied natural gas.

The plan will turn Freeport LNG from an import facility to an export facility, necessary after the discovery of "fracking" led to a spike in natural gas production in the United States and undercut the price of the commodity.

Freeport LNG officials say the change will bring jobs and investment into the local economy. But residents living in subdivisions north of the city of Oyster Creek since have expressed concern about a plant being built less than a mile away from their homes.

“Really we’re not against them having a plant,” Robert Tiano, a Hide-A-Way on the Gulf resident, said as he passed out flyers to people entering the open house.

“It’s where they want to put it,” said Jim Rio, a Hide-A-Way on the Gulf resident, as he finished Tiano’s sentence.

Rio and Tiano were a few of about a dozen people protesting the plant outside the Lake Jackson Civic Center during the open house.

One of the biggest concerns for residents of the four subdivisions within 2 miles of the proposed plan is the noise level.

“I love listening to coyotes and I love fishing,” Ballard said. “I know what I’m going to hear at night.”

The noise levels from the facility will be disturbing to nearby residents, he said.

Mallett, however, said they will be required by law to keep noise levels down to 55 dpa, “comparable to a refrigerator,” Mallett said.

There will be additional efforts to bring the noise levels down, including trees and berms around the facility, piping insulation and arranging the equipment in a way that minimizes noise levels, he said.

Residents also said they were concerned about safety in case of an industrial accident as their homes are on CR 792 and they have no way out if it’s blocked.

But Mallett believes those concerns can be assuaged when Freeport LNG completes an emergency response plan for the site.

It could be similar to the one Freeport LNG has for Quintana, which is viewable on Freeport LNG’s website, he said. However, Freeport LNG officials do not have the specifics of the pretreatment facility plan yet.

“They’re doing a good job of explaining all the aspects of the project,” said Demi-John resident Ken Plato. His concerns revolved around the traffic coming in and out of Freeport LNG’s sites, concerns he said largely were addressed.

“But if your house is at Hide-A-Way on the Gulf, then you have a lot different questions,” he said.

Many residents living near the proposed site say their biggest concerns were property values and their general way of life.

Hide-A-Way on the Gulf resident Kathy Davis believes no one will be interested in purchasing a home next to a large plant, even is it’s right on Oyster Creek.

“Who would buy a home out there?” she said.

There is nothing Freeport LNG can say or do to make their decision to put the facility next to residential property better, Donna McConnell said as she held up a sign in front of the Lake Jackson Civic Center.

Though she hadn't made it through the open house yet, she didn't think it was possible for them to change her mind.

"Be considerate of life instead of money," she said.

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