

White Stallion coal plant closer to development

By SHANNON DAUGHTRY | Posted: Saturday, December 17, 2011 2:00 am

BAY CITY — The Coastal Plains Groundwater Conservation District approved an amendment to an operating permit Friday morning, making the White Stallion Energy Center one step closer to development.

The board voted 6-1 in approval of how the water pumped from one Matagorda County landowner's well is used. Director Craig Kucera was against the vote.

The amendment was made to a pre-existing operating permit passed this year, board attorney Greg Ellis said.

"The permit was approved some time ago," he said.

The amendment allowed for 3,000 acre feet of the total permit amount of 3,597 acre feet to be used for industrial use instead of irrigation. The remaining 597 acre feet still will be used for irrigation, Ellis said.

The \$2.5 billion plant is set to be built between the Colorado River and FM 2668. Developers project the coal plant will be able to power 650,000 homes, according to White Stallion's website. White Stallion Energy Center will use coal and petroleum coke, also called pet coke, the website said. Proponents say it will bring about 2,250 jobs during the four- to five-year construction phase and 200 jobs once it is finished.

The community is divided over the \$2.5 billion coal plant and approval of the permit, and some spoke at Friday's meeting against the project.

Those against it say the plant will be an environmental detriment to the area and that project managers will not guarantee the amount of regional support of tax payments.

James Arnold, a lifelong Bay City resident, is concerned about the pumping of the county's groundwater and the future of the county's groundwater.

"I have nothing against wanting to pump water out for agricultural needs," Arnold said. "But I'm concerned about pumping water out in a billion-dollar plant, not knowing if it's going to be available 50 years from now."

Eddie Douglas, who has lived in Bay City since 1957, said the White Stallion Energy Center would draw people to Matagorda County.

"We seem to fight everything that comes in," Douglas said. "To encourage new industry and new people, we as Matagordians need to take the attitude that we need to give and take."

The permit amended Friday originally had allowed for 3,000 acre feet of the total permit amount of the 3,597 acre feet to be used for irrigation instead of industrial use.

Landowner Joey Sliva said the remaining land would be used for turf grass, so it would meet the requirements of being used for irrigation.

At the board's last meeting, a request to contest the case hearing was denied because protesters

could not provide sufficient information that would warrant a contested case hearing, Board President Haskell Simon said.

Those opposed to Sliva's permit said a hydrological study should be done to determine how much water is available in Matagorda County.

Sliva's attorney, Molly Cagle, said she had submitted information in response to General Manager Neil Hudgins stating that the water would be used for construction use only.

"This facility will not use water for cooling," Cagle said. "So there will be no thermal component for discharge. There's no loss of water through evaporation."

Approving the amendment to the permit is only part of what developers need to proceed with the White Stallion Energy Center, Ellis said. They still have to work to get construction permits, he said.

"They still have a ways to go," Ellis said.