Up in arms

Normandy Shores residents rail against city over clear-cutting

BY ANDREW MOORE
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Residents of a Seneca community made their presence known Tuesday night, filling council chambers for city's regularly scheduled meeting to voice their displeasure with a project they say has damaged their neighborhood.

A crowd of roughly 30 people — much larger than the typical council meeting crowd — filled council chambers.

Many of them were Normandy Shores residents, who were up in arms over the clear-cutting of roughly three-quarters of an acre of wooded property surrounding the city's water treatment plant.

> **'The residents of** Normandy Shores have experienced the worst short-term loss in home values and home equity since the Great Depression'
>
> **Herb Liverett**
> Opponent of clear-cutting project

One of the most vocal opponents of the project since it was completed earlier this month, Herb Liverett, used the public comments period of the meeting to rail against the cutting.

The project, which has exposed nearly an acre of red clay and the plant itself to a large portion of the Normandy Shores community, has resulted in a significant devaluation of many homes there, Liverett argued.

"The residents of Normandy Shores have experienced the worst short-term loss in home values and home equity since the Great Depression," Liverett said.

He added that through private discussions with real estate professionals in the area, he estimated the average value loss to the effected homes to be 20 percent or more.

FROM PAGE A1

He further argued that the project should have been advertised and subsequently discussed in a public hearing before being carried out.

Utilities Director Bob Faires bore the brunt of most of the residents' criticism, having directed the project after gaining permission from the five homeowners whose houses were directly adjacent to the water plant property.

But Mary Campbell used her time allotment to tell council she gave permission to remove trees along her property line.

"There was absolutel nothing stated about a clear cut all the way to the street," Campbell said.

Faires contended that the property owners he'd spoken with about the project were happy that they finally had the trees away from their houses, prompting a brief outburst from the crowd, who disagreed.

"The ones who butt up against the plant, I don't see them here tonight," Faires said.

He added that some claims that had been made about the wooded area — such as it containing 75-year-old trees — were simply not true, since the plant was roughly only 46 years old and the trees were planted around it in the late 1970's.

Faires said the project was necessitated by the damaged and hidden fence line along the water plant's property, and by requests made for tree removal by residents in the area.

But Barbara Barron, reading a letter on behalf of her husband, County Councilman Archie Barron, said the city should have at least consulted with the area's residents before moving forward with such a drastic plan.

She also asked if the homeowners association have a role in choosing how to landscape the now empty land.

"Now, the plant is the dominant feature from the street," Barron read. "It stands out like a sore thumb."

Earl Clevenger said it took the city only hours to destroy "the beauty it took God years to create."

Faires reiterated that he'd been in contact with a reputable landscape architect to develop a plan for creating an attractive buffer between the community and the plant.

"We're excited about where we're going, to be honest with you," Faires said.

"Come back a year from now and say that it looks terrible."

Faires was interrupted multiple times by angry residents as he tried to address council, and was frequently the target of the speakers' attacks, prompting him to open up his own comments with a bit of levity.

"I've been in the back listening," Faires said. "I hope I don't have any knives in my back when I get done talking."

COUNCIL PASSES BUDGET

Amid the heated discussion of Normandy Shores, the city's budget for the next fiscal year was $8.9 million, and includes no millage increase, which had been briefly discussed earlier this month as a potential source of funding for an additional police officer position.

The spending plan is now authorized after its second reading.

The Seneca Light and Water budget held steady at $27.2 and featured no utility rate increases of any kind.

The city's special revenue budget stands at $2.58 million.

The only difference between the budget presented at first reading and the one approved Tuesday was an $18,000 increase in a transfer from the city's investments account into the general fund.

That was done to fund a three-year lease-purchase agreement for a garbage truck, which had been originally set up on a five-year payment schedule.

andrew@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6684