

Local briefs: Kettleman City report will be discussed

The Fresno Bee, Tuesday, Jan. 11, 2011

State officials will be in Hanford today to brief the Kings County Board of Supervisors on the recently released final report on birth defects in Kettleman City.

The report includes comments from residents of Kettleman City but did not find the cause of birth defects in 11 children from 2007 through March 31, 2010. Three of the children died.

Scheduled to attend the meeting are Joan Denton, director of the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment, a division of the California Environmental Protection Agency; Dave Siegel, a scientist who developed the report; and Kevin Reilly, chief deputy director of policy and programs at the California Department of Public Health.

The report is scheduled for 9:30 a.m. at the Board of Supervisors meeting at 1400 W. Lacey Blvd.

Toxic waste lawsuit on supervisors' agenda

By Seth Nidever

Hanford Sentinel, Monday, Jan. 10, 2011

It looks like most of the action at Tuesday's county board of supervisors meeting will be behind doors in closed session. On the agenda is a 1-year-old lawsuit filed by a consortium of environmental groups against the board's action to grant a use permit allowing disposal giant Chemical Waste Management Inc. to build a new toxic waste landfill southwest of Kettleman City.

"A decision is coming soon," said Bradley Angel, executive director of environmental watchdog group Greenaction, one of the plaintiffs in the lawsuit. "I'm sure someone will appeal."

The suit alleges, among other things, that the county did not adequately review the environmental impacts of the proposed expansion. The suit also alleges discrimination in the public hearing process, arguing that Spanish speakers weren't treated fairly.

County officials maintain the landfill site is safe and that nobody has been discriminated against.

Greenaction is planning additional legal action for each of the permits Chem Waste has to get before the new toxic-waste landfill can be built, Angel said.

He said he expects years of litigation to tie up the process and delay the construction.

"I think it's going to be an ongoing fight," he said.

Supervisors aren't required to announce anything about the closed-session discussion while the lawsuit continues. If a settlement or decision is reached, however, they are required to report it.

The board meets at 9 a.m. in board chambers at the Kings County Government Center, 1400 W. Lacey Blvd.

[Fresno Bee commentary, Sat., Jan. 8, 2011:](#)

Remove sprawl from plan

By Chris Acree

Fresno County, like many other places across the nation, is struggling through a deep recession and a housing crisis. And while urban vacancy rates are rising, a silent drama is being played out on the rural fringes of town by developers planning for the next 30-plus years of new urban growth.

Despite all the current planning efforts to create compact land-use patterns and orderly outward growth, these new rural developments are leapfrogging past our planned growth boundaries and creating the perfect blueprint for sprawl.

Conservative estimates show Fresno County's population more than doubling to nearly two million residents by 2050, and savvy developers are lining up to rezone pastures to tract homes in

anticipation of this next wave of growth. If you think growth doesn't happen in a recession, you are dead wrong.

In fact, 20 miles north of Fresno's urban core, Fresno and Madera counties have already approved new development areas such as Rio Mesa, Gateway Village, and Millerton New Town to name a few. These projects will cumulatively create a new urban area with a population the size of Visalia along the San Joaquin River corridor.

The latest addition in Fresno County is a proposed expansion of the community of Friant. The Friant Ranch project will increase the population of Friant ten-fold, adding a 6,000-resident active-adult retirement community to an area that is now farmland, ranchland and open space.

Being so far removed from existing municipal infrastructure, Friant Ranch and its neighboring projects will have no economically feasible option other than to discharge millions of gallons per day of wastewater into the San Joaquin River.

The combination of chemical runoff from streets, landscapes, and pharmaceuticals in wastewater will degrade river habitats and threaten the return of salmon and other fish being reintroduced under the San Joaquin River restoration project.

Of particular concern to many residents and conservation groups is the large-scale wastewater treatment plant planned adjacent to Lost Lake Park on the San Joaquin River floodplain. For those who enjoy the park, or swim and fish in the river, the degraded water quality and aesthetics, odor and noise are not acceptable.

Friant Ranch and other "new towns" are left to their own devices to secure water supplies, often outcompeting existing cities and agriculture for the resource. Where are the water supply plans that will reverse our groundwater overdraft problems and why aren't our cities purchasing this readily available water supply?

Without coordinated plans for urban growth in the Friant-Millerton Region, project proponents are escaping responsibility for the true costs of environmental mitigation. Ratepayers will ultimately subsidize the increased environmental costs of rural development as developers profit.

The Fresno County General Plan encourages growth within spheres of influence and contiguous to urban cores where infrastructure exists to accommodate new growth. The Fresno SOI currently has more than 23,000 acres of undeveloped land, so why is it that our county planners are moving forward with these remote rural projects that are so obviously in conflict with our General Plan?

These proposed "new towns" promise privately financed urban infrastructure through fees passed on to the homeowners. This may seem attractive to decision-makers during times of wafer-thin county budgets, but the real costs of poorly planned projects will always rest squarely on the shoulders of the taxpayers.

Holding new growth within our existing growth boundaries is the only way we will sustainably develop in the upcoming decades and avoid the leapfrog development practices that have kept our downtown empty, [our air quality](#) poor, and our farmland steadily disappearing.

Chris Acree is executive director of Revive the San Joaquin, a nonprofit river stewardship organization working toward a restored San Joaquin River.