

No! Austin City Council withholds approval of temporary asphalt plant near I-65

Written by Marty Randall

Tuesday, 28 May 2013 00:00 -

A brief discussion by four members of the Austin City Council on Friday, May 24, was followed by a 3-0-1 vote against allowing a Cincinnati, Ohio, company set up and operate a temporary asphalt plant near the city's I-65 interchange.

The Council had met twice over the request submitted by the Jorgensen Company of Cincinnati. A special meeting was held Wednesday evening, May 22, at City Hall, with Councilmen James Kallembach, Nathan Campbell and John White present. Mayor Doug Campbell presented the request made by the private contractor who will be working for the Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT). Jorgensen recently won a multi-million-dollar contract with INDOT to make improvements to that stretch of I-65 between Scottsburg and Seymour.

On that Wednesday night, Mayor Campbell explained to the councilmen that he'd received a letter from the contractor requesting the Council's approval to set up a temporary asphalt plant off North Dowling Drive. The street once served a popular restaurant, Home Oven, and an A&W franchise. Currently, the only business located on the street is a truck stop which also serves cars and other vehicles. A private home is located at its north end. The far end of N. Dowling Drive connects with a section of Old State Road 256.

"I just wasn't comfortable with making this decision by myself. The contractor's plans call for the temporary plant to be there for two years. I felt you guys needed to be involved in the decision since it's going to affect residents in the area," Mayor Campbell stated.

As the discussion continued, the mayor said he learned through a telephone conversation with a contractor representative in Cincinnati that the plant may operate from 7 a.m. to 10 p.m. There will be more traffic, noise and dust created while the plant is located there. The owner of the property, listed as BDHS Austin Investment L.L.C., will have to make sure that the plant does not contaminate subsoil and water through leaching of products used or made by the plant.

Mayor Campbell said he was unsure about the contractor's time table. "I'm pretty sure they want to start fairly soon, say July, if we okay this," he said.

The plant will be operated through the winter as well, it was learned.

Campbell said he wants the plant located "...as far north on Dowling Drive as we can get it. That would give our residents (along State Road 256 and in the Spicertown area) some relief," he pointed out.

Though property taxes paid by the property's owner would not be affected by the presence of the asphalt plant, money collected through the County Optional Income Tax (COIT) could increase for those two years the plant will operate, the Mayor added, if employees reside in Austin or Scott County.

Any plans to install a temporary asphalt plant will have to be approved by INDOT.

Councilman Campbell said several residents of the area have asked him about the plant in recent days. "They heard about this, and they are concerned. Most definitely, they do not want it where the Home Oven used to be," he informed his fellow officials.

As he continued to talk about it, Councilman Campbell said he could not vote to allow the plant. "First, this is an issue that the entire Council needs to vote on. And if it comes to a vote tonight, I cannot support it in that area. There are too many concerns over noise, dust, smells and traffic," he concluded.

Since all three men would have had to vote to approve the issue to allow it to pass, and since Councilman Campbell had voiced his support of presenting it to the entire Council, the Council

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voted to recess and reconvene at 12 noon on Friday, May 24.

When the special meeting reconvened at noon that day, Mayor Campbell said he had learned through a further conversation with a Jorgensen representative that the company wanted to situate the plant where the old Home Oven stood. He also said he was told that, at times, the plant would operate 24 hours a day.

To add further weight to his arguments against the plant, Councilman Campbell came prepared that Friday with several pages of research he'd gathered on the Internet about asphalt plants. Some by-products, such as formaldehyde, are cancer-causing, he told his fellow officials.

There can be no certainty that pollution of water and soil will not occur, he added. "It's my opinion, it's not good in that particular spot nor would it be good in anybody's backyard. I wouldn't want it in mine or yours," he said indicating the rest of the Councilmen. He also contended that its presence could scare away any potential developments for the I-65 interchange over its two-year life span and possibly beyond if pollution does occur.

Councilman Lonnie Noble noted, "If this company really cared about this community, someone would have been here to answer our questions. We're just a temporary place for (the firm), and we might have to clean up any mess they leave behind."

He also pointed out that the Austin Redevelopment Commission has been trying to get investors interested in developing that area. The asphalt plant would deter such interest, he said.

"And if we have a constant parade of large trucks using North Dowling, who's going to pay for the road when it's all torn up?" Councilman Noble asked.

Councilman White added, "I live near Austin Tri-Hawk. That company does a wonderful job. There's no pollution, just a little noise and a little more traffic now and then. I can't imagine anyone living near an asphalt plant and not being affected by it. If I had to live close to this, I sure wouldn't be a fan of it."

The discussion winding to a close, Mayor Campbell asked the four Councilmen if they were ready for a vote.

They were. On Councilman Campbell's motion to deny the request, Campbell, White and Noble voted against it. Council President Kallembach abstained.

Mayor Campbell ended the meeting by saying that he would call the Cincinnati firm and tell them about the Council's decision.