Council abandons land application, moves to mechanical wastewater system

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By Ryan Moore, Reporter

HATTIESBURG, MS (WDAM) - After years of discussion and working with attorneys, Hattiesburg is scrapping plans for a land application wastewater treatment system.

The Hattiesburg City Council approved the decision to suspend all efforts for the matter in a 4-0 vote during its regularly scheduled meeting Tuesday.

"We got down to the nuts and bolts and in the meeting last Tuesday (and) it became very apparent that the Forestry Commission held the cards, and the process to get through the permitting, the process, was going to take years, and we don't have years," said Hattiesburg City Council President Kim Bradley.

In May, the council focused efforts on obtaining land in southern Forrest County on the Camp Shelby Joint Forces Training Center.

"The land was perfect, even more perfect than Lamar County," Bradley said. "We've got to be moving forward, because we are in an agreed order in the federal court with Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, with Environmental Protection Agency and Gulf Restoration Network. We've got to move forward."

Council members voted 4-0, with Councilwoman Deborah Delgado absent, to suspend the land application efforts and move forward with pursuing a mechanical treatment system.

"The lagoons will be cleaned up and done away with, we won't have those anymore, that's a cost again, $35 to $40 million, so the cost of the mechanical system is going to be $60 to $70 million more than what the cost of this land application system would have been," Bradley said.

According to Bradley, the mechanical system will be located at the city's lagoon.

"Roughly $130 to $140 million to construct it, and then an additional $35 to $40 million that you're going to have to spend to close the lagoons," Bradley said. "There's no doubt in my mind that the best solution was the land app system, it was a comprehensive solution that was end all, to the EPA, we would never ever have to build anything extra, we had what we needed."

"There were so many false things said and that will always remain disturbing to me, and to see our council in a divisive situation will always be disturbing to me," said Councilwoman Mary Dryden.

Bradley said, "There was just so much miscommunication, so much half-truths and non-truths that were said about the process, and it's forced us to move to build this mechanical treatment system."

Bradley added that he was hopeful to bring the project to the city, and that it could have been a showcase project.

"To do something this big, this large, would have been awesome, but if the folks don't want it and we are going to have this much obstacle to overcome, we can't do it," Bradley said.

The next step for the city is pushing the mechanical plans through and the construction to start, according to Bradley.

"The plans are 75 percent complete, it will take four to six months to get it back going again, but we can start construction of the road and the site preparation within the next 30 to 60 days, so that's when construction can begin," Bradley said.

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