



You Are Why We Are Here

**FRANKLIN COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
SPECIAL CALLED MEETING
December 10, 2019
6:00 p.m.**

BOC: Commission Chairman Thomas Bridges
District 1 Commissioner Robert Franklin
District 2 Commissioner Dr. Jason Macomson
District 3 Commissioner Ryan Swails
District 4 Commissioner Eddie Wester

Media: Shane Scoggins, Franklin County Citizen
MJ Kneiser WLHR

Staff: County Manager Beth Thomas
County Clerk Elaine Evans

Chairman Bridges called the Board of Commissioners special called meeting to order and welcomed everyone. He thanked David Groves, plant manager of GRP for coming to tonight's meeting. Chairman Bridges then asked Commissioner Wester to make his presentation.

Commissioner Wester said he has been involved with lots of discussions and has attended several meetings held by the citizens of the Double Churches community concerning the problems with GRP. The problems are ongoing and the citizens have attended many Board of Commissioners meetings to share their concerns and to ask for help to alleviate the issues they are having to live with. This past Saturday night Rodney Black contacted Commissioner Wester and told him that noise had been ongoing since six o'clock that morning. The noise had been so loud that Rodney and his wife, Tami could not hear the television over it. Commissioner Wester said the noise and smells have been talked about and several people have stated that at times their nostrils hurt when they are outside.

After speaking with the Double Churches citizens Commissioner Wester contacted the other Commissioners asking for help for these people and let it be known he was in favor of a special called meeting. Commissioner Wester stated later that night he received an email from Commissioner Macomson with information he had researched. After all the emails concerning this, it was decided that a motion would be made to help start the process of getting the citizens of Double Churches some relief from the issues that have dramatically affected their everyday life.



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Commissioner Wester asked for permission to read and make the motion. Chairman Bridges told him to please do so. Commissioner Wester made the following motion:

A. "The Franklin County Board of Commissioners finds that the continual and ongoing noise levels and chemical emissions produced by the operation of the Georgia Renewable Power Plant located in Franklin County, Georgia, have created a public emergency where the health and safety of the residents in the immediate vicinity of the plant are in imminent danger;

B. The Franklin County Board of Commissioners finds that an emergency condition exists where the dangerous noise levels and chemical emissions produced by the operation of the Georgia Renewable Power Plant located in Franklin County, Georgia, constitute a nuisance as defined in Section 18-6 of Chapter 18 of the Franklin County Code of Ordinances;

C. The Franklin County Board of Commissioners hereby refers this matter to the Franklin County Magistrate Court for further action as required in Chapter 18 of the Franklin County Code of Ordinances. The county manager is directed and authorized to begin proceedings in Magistrate Court and issue a notice of violation to Georgia Renewable Power of Franklin County, Georgia, that provides 30 days to achieve reasonable noise levels at or below 60-70 decibels at a radius of two miles around the plant, at reasonable times of the day and a reduction in chemical emissions that have been deemed carcinogenic substances by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences to levels that are determined to be safe and nonharmful by that organization." (This motion received applause from the citizens of Double Churches.)

Chairman Bridges asked for a second. Commissioner Macomson seconded the motion. Chairman Bridges asked for discussion. Commissioner Macomson explained the process in Section 18 of the Franklin County Code of Ordinances, commonly referred to as Nuisance Ordinance. Chapter 18 lists specific items that are considered nuisance such as pollution of public waterways. The ordinance has a prescribed process of complaints being referred to the county marshal who then takes it to Magistrate Court. The Magistrate Judge makes the determination of nuisance. Then the process of orders and abatement. Commissioner Macomson read Section 18-6, Emergency conditions; summary abatement, "Nothing contained in this article shall prevent the county commission from summarily and without notice ordering the abatement of or abating any nuisance that is a nuisance per se in the law or where the case is an urgent one and the health and safety of the public or a portion thereof is in imminent danger." He then stated the accrued evidence from the last four months clearly shows this situation to be a public safety issue.

Commissioner Macomson said he has been told that for over 15 years that Franklin County officials recruited GRP and a lot of work has been done to help them be a success. Since the beginning of the GRP operations there has been nothing but



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grief. For the last four months at Board of Commissioners meetings it has been person after person telling how miserable their quality of life has become since the start of GRP due to the noise, chemical emissions and water pollution. During this last four months no one from GRP has come before the Board although the meetings are open. Commissioner Macomson said GRP is not operating in the manner that was promised with no noise. After the start of operations, GRP then told that the noise would get better as the operations increased. Then GRP said the sound would be monitored and a silencer has been ordered and would be installed in a few weeks. Commissioner Macomson said the Commissioners and the residents in the area have been more than patient and there is no timeline or promise from GRP to do something about the problem to get it fixed. It is a matter of public record that GRP has been delinquent in paying their taxes. Commissioner Macomson said this pollution continues unabated and it is time for the Commissioners to declare the chemical emissions and noise to be of great public health significance and order GRP to abate the nuisances. Water pollution has also been a problem from GRP but they seem to be on top of it now because the permits from EPD and EPA would be pulled if not and they would be fined out of existence. Commissioner Macomson stated the Franklin County Code of Ordinances gives the County the power to act on these issues and make the citizens lives better. (The second and statements from Commissioner Macomson received applause from the Double Churches citizens).

Commissioner Swails questioned if the County has the authority to test wells. He said he would like for five to 10 wells to be tested every six months within a certain radius of the plant to see if the levels remain consistent and to have a baseline. Chairman Bridges said to stick with the ordinance the County has. He said this would need to be looked at legally and EPD has the oversight. Commissioner Macomson asked if there was a legal reason for the County to not test wells in this situation. Mrs. Thomas said the gratuity clause but it would be best to ask the County Attorney. Commissioner Macomson asked if Franklin County could go directly to EPD or EPA and ask them to test. Mrs. Thomas said this request could be made. David Grooves of GRP asked how many wells do they want tested. He said he is willing to take the request to Veolia and ask for the wells testing through an independent lab.

Commissioner Macomson requested a statement from the American Lung Association in Georgia on biomass combustion from June Dean, dated December 2, 2019, be entered into the record. He said this publication has important information regarding chemicals. "The American Lung Association does not support biomass combustion for electricity production, a category that includes wood, wood products, agricultural residues or forest wastes, and potentially highly toxic feedstocks, such as construction and demolition waste. Burning biomass can emit recognized air pollutants, including particulate matter (PM) and other carcinogens, which cause premature death and endanger respiratory health. Because of the multiple, ongoing risks to human health, the Lung Association urges Georgia Renewable Power to consider clean, renewable options to fuel its Madison County and Franklin County plants instead of biomass.



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Biomass is far from "clean" – burning biomass creates air pollution that causes a sweeping array of health harms, from asthma attacks to cancer to heart attacks, resulting in emergency room visits, hospitalizations, and premature deaths. Among the most dangerous of these emissions is particulate matter, also known as soot. These particles are so small that they can enter and lodge deep in the lungs, triggering asthma attacks, cardiovascular disease and even death. Particulate matter can also cause lung cancer. Railroad ties, like other wood products, can contain other chemicals from its years that may be highly toxic, including particulate matter and other carcinogens. Particulate matter is a recognized carcinogen, as well as a cause of premature deaths.

Biomass emissions contain fine particulate matter, sulfur oxides, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds (VOCs), and various irritant gases such as nitrogen oxides that can scar the lungs. Like cigarettes, biomass emissions also contain chemicals that are known or suspected to be carcinogens, such as polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) and dioxin.

Burning railroad crossties containing a creosote (or coal tar as it is frequently described), as is proposed by Georgia Renewable Power for its Madison and Franklin County biomass plants, adds additional unacceptable health risks due to the large increase in VOCs from the creosote coal tar resulting from burning of the crossties. These compounds in railroad crossties add to health threats from particulate matter and other toxins already produced by biomass power plants.

The National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) has determined that coal tars are human carcinogens. Several studies reviewed by NIEHS show that occupational inhalation of coal tar fumes results in excess cases of lung cancer as well as cancers of the bladder, kidney, and digestive tract. NIEHS states that coal tars may release toxic gases when they are burned. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has also concluded that coal tar creosote can cause some cancers due to human contact. ATSDR states that VOCs, when released from creosote, are rapidly absorbed through the lungs, stomach, or intestines."

*Commissioner Macomson summarized from this article that there are dangerous compounds and GRP is expected to do something to reduce the emissions to a not harmful level. (The citizens from Double Churches applauded again.) Chairman Bridges asked for a show of hands. The motion passed by five (5) **YES** votes to zero (0) **NO** votes. The **YES** votes were Commissioner Wester, Commissioner Macomson, Commissioner Swails, Commissioner Franklin and Chairman Bridges.*

*Chairman Bridges asked David Grooves and Kieran McManus from GRP to come forward and stated it is a pleasure to have them come to speak and answer questions. **Kieran McManus** said he has been involved for the past two years with the construction and commission of the project. He stated he would try to provide answers although he does not know the history of the planning. **Rodney Black***



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questioned Mr. McManus if a biomass plant was located his house. Mr. McManus said no. Mr. Black said that was where they were coming, the plant is in their backyard and they are having to endure all the noise, smoke and smell. The smell is like an overheated car hose and it burns your nostrils. Mr. McManus said these projects take years to get fully operational. The process is planning, financing, engineering and so forth. Mr. McManus said these projects typically take 30 months to build. There is a year and a half of heavy construction and then putting in equipment and building the system piece by piece. This plant is nearing completion but is behind schedule as it was scheduled to be finished by May and then put off to August.

Mr. McManus said the noise is coming from the plant startup of going through the boiler cleans and the cleaning of the pipework. For the last six to eight weeks they have been attempting to get the plant at full operations. There are numerous systems to be checked with stops and starts. Once the plant is operational this type of noise should only be heard once to twice a year when the safety checks are performed. Mr. McManus said one group is finishing so the operations came be taken over by Veolia. Mr. Black questioned how long will this take as the noise is keeping them from being able to sleep and this past Saturday the noise was unreal.

David Grooves said Saturday was a tough day, the operations were up and down. He stated a silencer has been ordered which engineers say will take the noise level down to 60 decibels. Several citizens questioned when the noise level and the vibrations would get better. Mr. McManus said they are trying to get to the end of commission, trying to get the operators up to speed and trying to get the plant reliable. The question was posed by several citizens what the timeline is for this. Mr. McManus stated they are working to get the contractor off site and the testing done so Veolia can assume full control of the plant.

Rodney Black stated six weeks ago he was told a silencer was ordered and would be put one. **Garvis McElroy** said every time something is questioned it is always put off. He said when the plant is running there is a rumble of about 50 decibels. The citizens were told they would not hear anything from GRP when it was up and running. They were also told that nothing would be burned other than clean biomass. Mr. McManus said the main noises now are the safety systems going off. **Gerry Wilson** asked if these were the pipes. Mr. McManus said yes and it occurs when the water is not heated up enough.

Mr. Grooves said their contract states at the finish the plant will not be louder than 80 decibels. **Tami Black** asked where the contract is and who signed it. Rodney Black stated he has been in his home since 2006. He bought a large amount of property because he has two sons and wanted to give them a place to hunt and fish. Mr. Black said the power plant was built in the middle of the community of Double Churches and it has totally devastated their lives. Mr. McManus said his goal is to try and fix what he can. Mr. McElroy asked what would happen if it can't be fixed, what then. Mr. McManus said they are working by their permit. Mr. McElroy said when



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GRP opened their permit said they would burn clean stuff. Then the permit was modified to burn other stuff including railroad ties. No one in the community was informed of the change to the permit.

***Ken Dickens** asked Mr. McManus and Mr. Grooves if GRP receives revenue for taking railroad ties to burn in the plants. They both answered no. Sheila Baker and Mr. Dickens asked why they were doing it. Mr. McManus said the railroad ties are supplied to them by other contractors. Mr. Dickens said he is not only concerned about the railroad ties; he is also concerned about the other toxic waste they are planning to burn. He asked if the plant could be run by only burning clean wood which was the initial commitment. Mr. McManus said they are only permitted to burn clean C&D, not waste C&D. Mr. McElroy said he has a copy of their permit and it states that ground up railroad ties can be burned and other stuff that was never discussed in meetings. He said when GRP decides to add to the permit no one in Franklin County is notified and is the fault of EPD because they advertise in the Atlanta papers. **Regina Weekley** told the Commissioners that she wants them to check if it is legal for EPA to run this in the Atlanta papers therefore not informing anyone in Franklin County.*

***Sheila Baker** asked Mr. Grooves and Mr. McManus the cost of clean wood chips. Mr. McManus said depending on where it comes from; 25 to 35. Ms. Baker asked the cost of the ground up railroad ties. Mr. McManus said the same rate. Ms. Baker then asked why toxic waste would be burned when it costs the same amount as clean products. Mr. Grooves said the former administration of EPA studied and said burning creosote railroad ties are not considered toxic. Ms. Baker told Mr. McManus and Mr. Grooves since they both have stated they have worked in this type power plant for over 20 years if they make noise. Mr. McManus said sure they make noise. Ms. Baker then asked them why would they locate a plant on top of homes, why not put it somewhere away from homes. Mr. Black said you are right in the middle of a rural community. Mr. McManus said that is fact and he can't change that; this was in place when he came to work for them.*

Ms. Baker asked Mr. Grooves and Mr. McManus if they were aware the plant is sitting on top of white candy rock, not bedrock. Mr. McManus said the plant is stable with steel pylons. Ms. Baker told them she knew there were pylons but the white stuff they drilled through known as candy rock or sugar dirt will not hold water. She then asked how much clay was backfilled and how deep it is. Mr. McManus said it was not backfilled it is stable with pylons. Mr. McElroy questioned what is under where the biomass material is dumped and what will keep the water from going into the groundwater and then into wells. The question was then asked by Ms. Baker how the ponds are being monitored so a runoff into the creek won't happen again.

Mr. Grooves said the construction was delayed for over five months and the fuel was brought in. Biomass is fine unless it is left for longer than two months and it will start decomposing and it gets hot and smolders. Mr. Grooves said he made the error of putting water on the material and tannins then went into the creek. He said because



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the material is organic it pulled the oxygen out of the water thus killing the fish. He apologized for this. All of this material has been removed and Mr. Grooves and GRP are working with EPD so this doesn't happen again. The ponds are now being checked every six hours for the PH levels. If the PH levels are out of range they are immediately pumped. Mr. McManus said there is a dedicated environmental site manager that monitors both plants and the shift supervisors are monitoring as well. Aerators have been purchased by GRP to help with the overflow of the ponds although they haven't been received yet. Mr. Black questioned if all of this shouldn't have been done before the plant was built.

James NeSmith questioned what the sound level will be. Mr. Grooves said the low frequency might not be so bad but a mile or so away might be. Gerry Wilson asked what he considered not so bad. Mr. Grooves said probably something like 65 decibels. He said he works for Veolia and they have just recently taken over control of the plant. If anyone has a problem to please, let him know and he will take care of it. Mr. Grooves said he will send people out to check the decibel level because they do not want to ruin people's lives. Mr. McManus said startup is a very noisy process. Several of the citizens said this isn't startup, it's ongoing.

Corey Schiffer asked the length of time it takes from when a fire is started until it is up and running. Mr. Grooves said from the time the fire is put in until it is up and running is eight hours and it is not noisy for the whole time. Mr. Schiffer asked how long was it noisy during startup. Mr. Grooves said it probably lasts three to four hours. Mr. Grooves said the noise is coming from the valves where the silencers will be placed. Mr. Schiffer said he feels vibration at night when he tries to sleep and also feels it on his front porch. While doing laundry recently Mr. Schiffer stated he felt the vibration and could hear the noises over his washing machine. Mr. Grooves said he is surprised about the vibration.

Angie Hart asked Mr. McManus and Mr. Grooves if there is any way that this can be monitored when it starts up. She said she has two kids in school and their sleep is interrupted. Mrs. Hart said she also feels the vibration in her house. Mr. Grooves said he is monitoring that. Mr. McManus said to bear with them, the operators are new and this is part of the problem.

Mrs. Wilson asked Mr. McManus if he is at GRP every day. He said he monitors both Madison and Franklin and a plant in North Carolina but Mr. Grooves and his team are at the plant every day.

Tim Kirk told Mr. Grooves and Mr. McManus he is concerned about the air quality as it burns his eyes and throat and goes into his lungs. He said some days the smell will knock you down. This is disastrous because you and your children can't go outside. Mr. Kirk said the air quality is devastating to the County and the only thing he can say is God help us. Mrs. Hart said her 21-year-old needs a CPAP and the doctor told them the plant is not helping the situation. Mr. McManus said they are monitoring



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to the best of their ability. Mr. Grooves told the citizens to please call him when the smell and noise is bothering them. Tami Black stated a coworker told her that she drove down Hwy 198 with the car windows up and she doesn't know how they can stand the smell and noise. Mr. Grooves asked what it smells like. Ms. Baker told him most of the time it is a real strong chemical smell. Mr. Black said yes and it burns your nostrils. Mr. Grooves said that he really wants to find out what the smell is and correct it. Mrs. Hart's daughter said she smells it on her way to school and it smells like a really strong Sharpie. Mr. Kirk said it is worse than burning tires, it burns your eyes. He said the air pollution can be smelt at Banks Crossing in another county.

Mr. Schiffer said he is concerned about the saturated wood because he is a beekeeper. He said creosote is a pesticide and he does not his bees drinking from contaminated water sources. The suggestion was made by Mr. Schiffer for the piles of wood to be covered because this would help with keeping the bees safe and would also help with the smell.

Chairman Bridges asked Mr. Grooves and Mr. McManus to stay and talk with the citizens. Mr. Kirk thanked the Commissioners for taking action. Chairman Bridges adjourned the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

Signed on the _____ day of _____, 2020

Chairman J. Thomas Bridges

Robert L. Franklin, District 1 Commissioner

Dr. Jason Macomson, District 2 Commissioner

Ryan Swails, District 3 Commissioner

Eddie Wester, District 4 Commissioner

Elaine H. Evans, County Clerk