

For Immediate Release

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Landfill money which benefits Hutto ISD resulted from citizen involvement in contract

If the Williamson County commissioners court votes to convey \$45,000 from a special landfill fund to the Hutto ISD through the Hutto Education Foundation on May 11 (agenda item 14), the beneficiaries have numerous citizens to thank.

As the county's revised landfill agreement was being debated in 2008 and early 2009, the Hutto City Council (HCC), the Hutto Citizens Group (HCG), the Williamson County Public Policy Coalition (WCPPC) and numerous citizens sought benefits for east Williamson County and especially Hutto—the areas most adversely affected by the landfill.

The initial drafts of the contract which were released to the public in February of 2009 contained no benefits for the Hutto area, but when the “final” draft was presented and passed on March 3, 2009, after a strong citizen push, the contract contained the provision for the Hutto ISD to get one percent of the landfill tipping fees—31 cents per ton.

“No one looks a gift horse in the mouth, whatever the amount,” said Kurt Johnson, Sr., staffer for the WCPPC and a member of the HCG, “and citizens are pleased that the Hutto ISD is finally receiving a belated benefit. But it's important to note that without the continued pressure and input from citizens aimed at commissioners court, this amount, small though it may be, would never have made it into the contract.”

Actions by the Hutto City Council were included in the focused citizen and stakeholder effort to derive mitigating benefits from the county to offset the adverse consequences of the landfill's location four miles north of Hutto. On December 18, 2008, the Council unanimously passed a motion which insisted that the county not continue with the permit application to expand the landfill in the absence of an ironclad Master Site Plan to protect Hutto. Voting in favor of that resolution were Ken Love, Tina Slaton, Debbie Holland, Ronnie Quintanilla-Perez, David Begier, Jason Wirth and Felix Madrid.

Ironically, an acceptable Master Site Plan to protect Hutto still has not been developed, even though the permit expansion was approved more than a year ago. A preliminary filing of a Master Site Plan by Waste Management in March of this year is incomplete two months after the filing deadline and hasn't been approved by the county.

Even though citizens were successful in convincing a reluctant commissioners court to include benefits for

Hutto in the contract which was passed more than a year ago, strong citizen opinion persists that the east Williamson County and Hutto areas still haven't been adequately protected from the landfill's adverse consequences—not only from inadequate mitigation funding but also from inadequate provisions in long-term plans for the facility.

During his tenure as a member of the Hutto City Council in 2008 and 2009, Felix Madrid worked tirelessly in an effort to insulate Hutto through better provisions in the landfill contract and permit. He points to the county's promise to hold a charette in the summer of 2008 so Hutto could have input into the size of the beneficial fund and the long-term development plan for the landfill. Madrid expresses exasperation over the fact that the county never convened the promised charette.

“Hutto has borne the burden for the county and surrounding counties for a long time,” said Madrid. “Hutto has had the short end of the stick and will for a long time. One percent is definitely the short end of the stick.”¹

Madrid adds, “The community should have input on what the fee percentage should be. That's one of the things we should be talking about.”² Madrid points out that the county never consulted the Hutto community on what level of funding from the landfill would constitute adequate compensation.

“An honest look at the landfill's impact makes it clear that Hutto's north growth corridor, and especially the Chandler Road corridor, will experience retarded economic development unless additional, major mitigation occurs—primarily through a stellar Master Site Plan and upgraded funding for these Hutto beneficiaries,” Johnson said.

The Hutto Citizens Group, which led in the effort to reform the landfill development process and the landfill contract, continues to be active, insisting that the dedicated community funds be upgraded to a more adequate level, especially in light of the huge volumes of cash that flow through the landfill coffers. The group is also planning to address the Master Site Plan whenever the county gets around to considering it, and it presently is a party in the appeal of the lawsuit against the permit expansion decision rendered by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality in March of 2009, which enlarges the landfill footprint from 202 acres to 575 acres and from 70 feet in height to 144 feet in height.

A long list of HCG members worked on getting the funds for Hutto into the contract along with seeking other provisions to protect and benefit the greater Hutto area. That list of members includes Felix Madrid, Jason Wirth, Mahlon Arnett, Cindy Allen-Lott, Ken Kincaid, Betty Sun, Weldon Copeland, Jeff Maurice, Deann Tidwell, Kurt Johnson, Sr., Mike Fowler, Jerry Tidwell, Mark Lidell, Charles Shell, Hugh Tidwell, Robbie Arnett, Orlynn Evans, and numerous others. In July of 2008, some 150 citizens crowded into the Hutto Lutheran Church parish hall to discuss options for the landfill. County representatives were invited, but did not attend.

“If you're looking for someone to thank for Hutto's funding, the people on that HCG are a good place to start,” Johnson said.

1 This quote from Felix Madrid was provided to the WCPPC by Madrid in late April. Madrid also provided it to Tricia Rosetty, a reporter for *The Taylor Daily Press* who used it in an article published in the *Press* datelined May 4, 2010.

2 Ibid.