

South La. port cut as defendant in Formosa suit

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A state judge on Tuesday dismissed the South Louisiana Port Commission as a defendant in a lawsuit seeking to block construction of the Formosa Plastics Corp. rayon and petrochemical plant in St. John the Baptist Parish.

The lawsuit, filed in April by Save Our Wetlands, a group critical of the plant and St. John officials' efforts to woo it, says the Port Commission conspired with St. John officials to expropriate land needed for the \$25 million deep-water pier the commission has promised Formosa.

In addition to the commission, the lawsuit named as defendants Parish President Lester Millet, the Parish Council and the nine parish councilmen.

But Ad Hoc Judge Remy Chaisson agreed with Port Commission attorneys who said the commission had little to do with rezoning 1,800 acres of land in Wallace for the proposed plant — which prompted the suit.

The suit says the Parish Council, in rezoning the land to accommodate heavy industry, acted outside its powers.

Formosa plans to build a \$2 billion plant on the site of the old Whitney Plantation. The Taiwanese company has not announced when construction is to begin.

"We didn't do anything," said Lloyd LeBlanc of LaPlace, the Port Commission's attorney.

"That's why we wanted to get out of the suit."

"They (Save Our Wetlands) say we conspired with the Parish Council in expropriating land, but we didn't," LeBlanc said.

The Port Commission's involvement in helping St. John land the Formosa plant includes selling \$25 million in revenue bonds to build a deep-water port for Formosa.

In December the commission agreed to build the 2,000-foot pier after Formosa requested it. The pier will be owned by the commission, but will be leased to Formosa, port officials said.

St. John officials, meanwhile, have pledged up to \$1 million in economic development money for pier construction.

Plant opponents had said the Port Commission and parish officials planned a systematic and illegal expropriation of bature land from west bank property owners so the pier could be built.

LeBlanc on Tuesday said Formosa, not the Port Commission, is currently involved in buying land for the pier.

Vacherie, La., attorney Paul Aucoin, representing Save Our Wetlands during Tuesday's hearing, was not available for comment Tuesday.

Chaisson, a retired district judge from Thibodaux, La., has been assigned to hear the lawsuit. It was originally assigned to Judge G. Walton Caire's division, but Caire recused himself.

A date has not been set for the hearing.