

OPINIONS

LETTERS

Restoration Coalition opposes Formosa

Editor:

Tomorrow night, the real discussion on Formosa Plastics begins. On Monday, March 26, at 6:30 p.m. in the St. John the Baptist Parish courthouse in Edgard, a public hearing will be held to consider the rezoning of Whitney Plantation and other land on the west bank of St. John Parish from rural to heavy industrial to allow the construction of the proposed occupation.

Another significant new group opposing the zoning change is the River Road Restoration Coalition (RRRC), an organization composed of environmentalists, preservationists, historians, archaeologists, property owners and others with a common interest in promoting the economic vitality of and interest in the rich heritage of the River Road, while at the same time preserving the environment.

The RRRC is founded on the understanding that:

1. The River Road between New Orleans and Baton Rouge is probably second in historical and architectural importance to the French Quarter itself.

Since pre-Colonial times, this stretch of the River Road in particular has been of enormous and largely unrecognized importance for settlement and economic, agricultural, scientific and educational innovation.

Unfortunately, much evidence

for this has been irretrievably destroyed. Yet the area's uncommon historic and archaeological value, if properly preserved and managed, could yield attractive economic benefits in itself.

2. One obstacle to the development of these unique historical resources is the push toward more large, capital-intensive petrochemical industries, expanding to cover an increasing amount of land

The proposal also seriously threatens Evergreen Plantation (immediately adjacent to Whitney), one of the last complete existing plantation complexes in Louisiana. What is little understood, even by many preservationists, is that each plantation was a unique community in itself, far more than just a "big house" would suggest.

The proposed zoning change would significantly disturb the last "green belt" remaining along the River Road — about 30 miles on the west bank in the hundred-mile stretch between the cities — which currently acts as an environmental buffer zone.

Especially in Louisiana, which ranks right at the top in terms of pollution and rock bottom in the number of acres of state parks per person, alternative land use and development plans should be considered.

Formosa Plastics, the proposed purchaser of the land, is proposing a \$2 billion chemical facility, only

one-quarter of which is a rayon manufacturing plant. Formosa has left its mark of pollution everywhere it has been. The company decided not to expand in its homeland in the face of more than 1,000 angry farmers protesting the pollution and steadily mounting labor problems.

The state of Delaware revoked all of Formosa's permits in 1985 for repeated releases of carcinogens.

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