



John Boss photo/State-Times

Rambling foliage creeps up to the front door of Whitney Plantation in Wallace

## St. John council rezones acreage for proposed Formosa plant site

By Vicki Ferstel/  
River Parishes Bureau

EDGARD — Opponents of a proposed Formosa Plastics Corp. plant appealed in vain to the St. John the Baptist Parish Council Thursday night before the council rezoned the planned plant location.

Before a packed and often unruly crowd, the council voted 8-0 to rezone 1,300 acres of Whitney Plantation in Wallace from residential to industrial. One parish council member, Joel McTopy, recused himself because of his vested financial interest.

Formosa has proposed building a \$2 billion rayon pulp plant and may also build a PVC plant at the site.

Various state and federal permits required for the plant are pending.

The company promised to donate the historic Whitney Plantation home and 5.6 acres to the parish, to train local workers and to build a state-of-the-art plant meeting state and federal environmental regulations.

Meanwhile, a spokesman for state Sen. Cleo Fields, D-Baton Rouge, announced that Fields will introduce legislation during this session to prohibit the siting of certain industrial plants in "sensitive" communities and over sole-source underground water supplies.

Opponents appealed to the parish council to either deny or delay the rezoning request.

They cited the company's poor environmental record in Baton Rouge, Taiwan, Texas and Delaware. They questioned the large tax breaks given to the company and they claimed the plant would destroy the predominantly black community of Wallace and harm nearby historic homes.

Proponents cited the need for jobs in the economically depressed area.

Opponents Carl Baloney of River Area Planning Group and Luke Fontana of Save Our Wetlands were ejected from the parish council chambers because of their outbursts.

When the public hearing was closed before some opponents had an opportunity to voice their opinions, shouts of "recall! recall!" rang through the room until a five-minute recess was called.

"We were invited to St. John Parish by both the governor and the parish council," said Alden Andre, vice president of operations for Formosa. "We were introduced to only two sites in St. John Parish."

If that site had not been approved, Alden said, the company would have taken the project from the parish and from the state.

Samuel Jackson of Wallace opposed the rezoning request, which included his property. "They don't even own the land and they want it rezoned," he said.

However, Paul Stein, who said he lived within a mile of the proposed plant, said, "I'm in total support of Formosa."