

## **Caddo hearing tonight**

By MIKE ELSWICK, Managing Editor

Marshall News-Messenger

Monday, February 27, 2006

While the proposed use of approximately 2,000 acres of the former Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant site as a possible business campus complex in the future has drawn a large amount of local debate, outsiders involved in economic development say the proposal is based on solid concepts – on the surface.

"If a major industry would locate on that site it would be a life changing event" for not only Harrison County, but for the entire region, said Carlton Swabb, president and chief executive officer for the Texas Economic Development Council based in Austin. The council is a statewide association of those involved in economic development in the state.

Swabb said the concept of setting aside a large site of the size of the one available near Karnack for future job creation and economic growth is unusual in this day and time.

"If, as a region, you have a mega-site like the Longhorn property, it is a major advantage for the entire region," Swabb said. As a former economic development consultant, Swabb said he personally visited the site about 10 years ago.

Swabb said the site meets basic criteria large businesses might be looking for, such as rail service, nearby interstate highway access, water, electric service and telecommunication access. He said any Fortune 500-type company that might be interested in such as site would know millions of dollars would have to be spent in getting the property in condition to meet their customized needs.

"But you need to have these variable and factors in place just to get looked at," Swabb said. But, he added, those large projects do not come along often meaning the property could sit idle for years before it is even considered by a company.

"Then, there is no guarantee the property would meet the location criteria of the company," he said. "At best, it would be a once-in-a -decade type occurrence. For a really large project, you would be in competition with states having mega-sites and you would likely also be in global competition."

Swabb said Ford has looked at Texas for a possible future facility as has car maker Kia.

"But there is a lot of restructuring and plant closing going right now so it's hard to say what might happen in the future," he said.

Gregg County Judge Bill Stoudt said his county is small and land-locked with no potential sites near as large as the proposed Karnack business park campus site. Stoudt, who was on the Longview Economic Development Corp. board for years, said if a large company was ever serious about the Longhorn site, the state would most likely step in to help provide inducements.

"For large projects like that there would be state money available," Stoudt said. "Millions of dollars were committed by the state of Texas when Toyota committed to build a plant in San Antonio.

"I know there are environmental concerns with the site but I feel Judge (Wayne) McWhorter and others involved in the process would address those concerns,"

Stoudt said. "With more than 6,000 acres still dedicated to the wildlife refuge, that's still a lot of land."

He feels that if and when any company expressed an interest in the site the community would have input on the location and could address environmental issues.

Stoudt said should a large-scale campus employing at least several hundred workers ever locate on the Karnack site it would be a big boost for the entire region.

"It would be a powerful asset for East Texas," Stoudt said of the potential for getting large companies to look at the region for a potential new plant. "For car manufacturing companies like Mercedes and Toyota, having 1,000 acres or more available just offers a lot of flexibility."

John Stroud, executive director of Longview Economic Development Corp., said he is not aware of many, if any, potential business park campus sites in Texas as large as the Karnack property.

"It has the advantage of being used as an industrial site in the past," Stroud said. "There are a lot of other factors that would go into any decision, like availability of labor, but if you don't have the right sized site you don't even get looked at."

Stroud said his entity has gotten a number of inquiries from companies looking for potential sites of between 100 and 200 acres,

"We just don't have anything even that large over here. We couldn't even get past round one with the companies because we did not meet that basic criteria," Stroud said.

The possibility of a "smokestack" industry ever proposing a plant at the site are almost non-existent today, Stroud said.

"With the federal Clean Air Act and Clean Water Act, anything locating on the site would need to be compatible with those rules and regulations," he said.

Stroud also said public debate and input on the proposal is good.

"This needs to be something your entire county has to consider," Stroud said. "A few people on either side should not be making such a decision."

If You Go:

What: The Harrison County Commissioners Court public hearing on proposed use of approximately 2,000 acres of former Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant property

Why: To learn from residents whether they support use of about 2,000 acres of the former industrial plant site for use as a possible business park site in Karnack

When: 7 p.m. tonight

Where: Marshall City Commission chambers, first floor, Marshall City Hall, 401 S. Alamo Street

Who: Any person interested in the future of the former Longhorn Army Ammunition Plant site is encouraged to speak