

Citizens, state, county, city leaders voice opposition to TCEQ for proposed cement kiln in Dorchester

Denison's Hilton Garden Inn was packed full of concerned Grayson County residents who were adamantly opposed to a quarry and cement plant proposed on 600 acres in Dorchester by BM Dorchester, LLC. Members of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) were present to hear the concerns from citizens and state, county, and city officials on an air quality permit which would be the first of its kind to be issued for an area as heavily populated as Grayson County. The meeting which began at 7 pm lasted until 10:30 pm with dozens of concerned citizens speaking on the topic and pleading their case for the cement kiln to not move into Grayson County. State Representative Reggie Smith, State Senator Drew Springer, County Judge Bruce Dawsey, and County Commissioner Jeff Whitmire were all heavily opposed to the plant and made their voices heard that there would be a legislative battle and judicial battle that would heavily impact their pockets.

"We have the largest corporate investment in Texas history with T.I. (Texas Instruments) here," said Smith of the \$30 billion investment locally along with the \$6 billion investment from GlobiTech. "This chip manufacturing conglomerate that is coming in here is about national security. Because right now we're buying our chips from China."

Smith went on to say that the North Texas area is the beginning of what will become a national security hub. The Republican nominee for House District 62 Shelly Luther reiterated Smith's points and stated she would not support the project.

The main argument from the crowd was the air, water, and noise pollution, but Wyatt Watson, project manager and engineering director for GlobalWafers stated that they chose this area because it met all the requirements needed for chip manufacturing. One of those requirements is vibration isolation. Their billions of dollars of investments rely solely on the stability of the ground in order to produce silicon wafers. Watson said they have made the investments to isolate any vibrations from the surrounding area through layers of concrete that are attached to limestone bedrock. However, there would be no isolation from the constant blasting of the limestone which would render North Texas as a useless environment to their industry.



A standing room only crowd at Denison's Hilton Garden Inn. *Staff photo.*

"The problem we have is not an annoyance problem, it's a physics problem," said Watson. "We simply cannot grow crystal if we have a vibrating facility. It simply won't work."

Watson said this is a risk not only to their financial investment, but to the security of the United States as a national security threat due to the product being manufactured in America instead of overseas as has been the case for decades. A national, state, and local effort was made for their industry.

Silicon driver Texas Governor Gregg Abbott was not in attendance but is scheduled to have meetings with local elected officials this week.

State Senator Drew Springer, who decided not to run for re-election, spoke of the air quality issues that it will bring and said it will affect not only Grayson County, but other surrounding counties as well. Jace Yarbrough, running for his seat, reiterated his point and said it was bad for Grayson County and it's bad for Texas and told the BM Dorchester panel that he would not support their efforts.

Grayson County Judge Bruce Dawsey was unhappy that the only issue for discussion was air quality and none of the other multiple areas of concern, such as water, seismic activity, and all other environmental qualities.

"How can we trust Black Mountain to follow all the compliance rules when they cannot even fill out the TCEQ application correctly. You listed the school district as Gunter (instead of Howe ISD). There are numerous things that you forgot to put such as the airport that's out there," said Dawsey.

Dawsey mentioned air quality studies that were measured from Denton which is 180 feet lower than Grayson County. He mentioned that the particulate matter would drift outside of their location and into Hagerman Wildlife Refuge.

Commissioner Whitmire told the panel that Grayson County has the biggest tech giants that are investing millions of dollars that may end up going away and not being worth anything.

"We will be working with the Red River Conservation District to prevent them from being able to get the well access. I know that's not your issue (speaking to the TCEQ panel), but that is our issue and we're going to fight it with everything we have," said Whitmire. "We fully expect that there's going to be an enormous amount of litigation that goes on with our industries who are detrimentally impacted by the activities of this, and Grayson County will be right in there with them fully supporting those actions. So, I don't know what kind of deep pockets Black Mountain has, but I don't think you have as deep of pockets as some of our industries that are here."

Sherman Economic Development Corporation President Kent Sharp told the BM group that his words were not a warning, but a fact that tech giants will not be risking their investment.

"We will fight in the political arenas, we will fight in the judicial arenas, and in any other arena. We will bring every resource," said Sharp who then urged TCEQ to deny their application as those ahead of him did also.

Howe Mayor Karla McDonald spoke to the TCEQ board mainly about the water quality indicating that the three ground wells that Howe has could be contaminated and even the surface water from the run-off.

"Black Mountain will only create a mountain of negative health, environmental, and economic problems for our community," said Mayor McDonald. "We don't want a Black Mountain of problems in our lovely community."

Dorchester David Smith, who was met with a resounding round of applause from the audience, spoke for six minutes on the errors on the application and the convenient changes that took place by TCEQ. He also mentioned the decreased property values, damage to vegetation, habitats, and the effect it will have for a 30-mile radius.

"The slipshod work is apparent, and this application is not complete or accurate nor follows normal quarry practices for an air study according to some engineers," said Mayor Smith.

Smith concluded with a noise ordinance from the City of Dorchester that would prohibit 24-hour operation from the cement kiln to protect the safety, health, and enjoyment of the residents located in close proximity.

Howe Councilman Sarah Myrick said their application and signage did not meet the standards of bilingual statutes and requested the application to be rejected and resubmitted by BM Dorchester.

"But there's a deeper issue here," said Myrick. "We have seven emails from the last 30 days where a TCEQ employee has corrected the application that BM Dorchester filled out. In one, there's even advice on how to get this public meeting done before the new PM 2.5 standard comes around. It's a glaring issue and it feels like an intentional omission in the change of the application."

Myrick asked the TCEQ board to reject the application and assure the public that the new person that oversees the permitting application process to be impartial and to follow all the rules.

After BM Dorchester was found to wrongly fill out the application and stating that Dorchester was in Gunter's school district, Howe Superintendent Kevin Wilson spoke and said that he represented HOWE ISD and that the Howe ISD had numerous school sites and proposed school sites within a five mile radius—one being as close as two miles. He argued that the planned quarry and cement plant would impact his students.

"They say the air quality, as it meets the property line, will meet minimum standards. I can tell you the students of Howe ISD deserve more than minimum standards. said Wilson.

Dorchester Baptist Church Pastor Zach Polling did what a Baptist Preacher does and gave three bullet points with a spiritual message. Directing his message to the TCEQ board, he said that they are there to make a ruling, but the ruling comes from God.

"I want you to consider that you're about to lay your hands on the bride of Jesus Christ. That's my church," said Polling. "You very well may make her homeless. If you fear God, you better take into consideration what her Husband Jesus Christ thinks, because I don't think he's amused."

Polling then said there will come a day when all will stand before their Maker and asked them if they were right with Jesus Christ.

"You will give an account on how you rule on this matter and how it affects His bride so please take that into consideration.

Howe Councilman Billie Ingram stated that the proposed cement kiln was in Howe's Fire District and said there is no possible way Howe could handle that kind of service to a plant of that magnitude.

"We don't have the manpower nor the resources. Your plant will burn," said Ingram to the BM Dorchester panel.

Howe's City Administrator Monte Walker reiterated the points from State Rep Smith, State Senator Springer, County Judge Dawsey, and Commissioner Whitmire saying they have a fight on their hands.

"If you thought you were going to a little Podunk area with a little small town mayor, you picked the wrong area," said Walker. "You have to answer to your shareholders, but here in Grayson County, you can take a look at the room, we are the stake holders here."

Dozens of concerned citizens from all over Grayson County rallied in opposition for this event and as time drug on, it seemed that most wanted their shot at the microphone to speak on the effects to livestock, wildlife, as well as their land and future generations.

Springer pointed out an article stating that the Environmental Protection Agency recognizing the sickness and illnesses that are in Midlothian presume caused by the cement kilns.

"Six of the 10 largest polluters in the DFW area are cement kilns in Ellis County, said Springer. "Grayson County should not be in that same category.

Springer asked TCEQ for additional time and to leave the comment section open for more people to voice their concerns.