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EDITORIALS

Clear the Air on Gas Drilling

City Hall owes answers on Trinity East deal

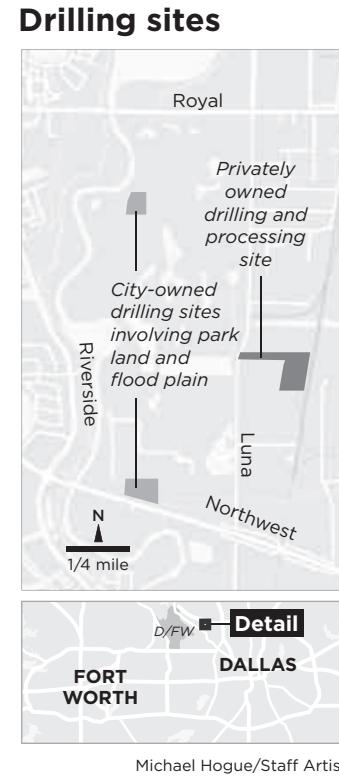
Rewind the tape on the gas drilling issue to nearly January, when the Dallas Plan Commission decided to reconsider the same Trinity East application that it had just rejected. Pretty much everything from that point on has been one big troubling and tangled mess.

This is what happens when a city takes the money and runs — and only later has to figure out how to handle unfortunate strings attached to the deal. In this case, Dallas faces the possibility of being hit with an expensive lawsuit or saddled with a drilling operation in a location that current city law doesn't even permit.

The Trinity East deal actually dates to 2008, when the city accepted millions of dollars from the company — at a time when the municipal budget picture was far from pretty — in exchange for granting it a lease to drill under city-owned flood plains and park land.

In the ensuing years, environmental concerns over drilling have grown. Regrettably, despite appointing a task force to recommend more comprehensive guidelines, the City Council has yet to approve any new rules. So late last year, Mayor Mike Rawlings said he supported granting Trinity East its permits while moving ahead on rules for future applicants.

In December, the Plan Commission considered the Trinity East proposal — and rejected it after hearing from drilling critics about concerns over water use and risks of toxic emissions. Yet almost immediately the Plan Commission's chairman called for the application to



Michael Hogue/Staff Artist

get a second hearing.

As if that wasn't strange enough, the do-over introduced even more questions as environmentalists focused more sharply on whether emissions from a nearby gas processing unit that Trinity East would need to support drilling would undercut North Texas' efforts to clean the air. They also questioned the wisdom of a drilling operation close to soccer fields.

Next came the unsettling revelation that City Manager Mary Suhm signed a letter in August 2008 with Trinity East, pledging her staff's assistance in "obtaining other permits necessary to create a drill site location and production facility" in the park land. The letter seems to contradict what City Council members think they approved back in 2008: subsurface fracking only. (Under that plan, the gas well pads

would be placed elsewhere and the drilling would occur horizontally under the parkland.)

Suhm, meanwhile, maintains that she pledged routine cooperation from city staff, offered no special favors and didn't mislead the City Council.

So far, the only good thing to come of all this is that any decision on Trinity East has been put on hold for three months. This newspaper hopes the delay gives the city a chance to find the best possible strategy on behalf of its residents.

Strong gas drilling guidelines are needed so this mess doesn't happen again. More immediately, the public deserves answers on exactly what was involved in this Trinity East deal and why the company should be allowed to drill on parkland.

BRIDGING DALLAS' NORTH-SOUTH GAP

Make the Dirt Fly

Federal-local discord is stalling Veterans Place project

Few planned projects carry the high stakes that City Hall puts on Veterans Place, a seven-acre, transit-oriented development across Lancaster Road from the VA Medical Center in south Oak Cliff. It's a core feature of Mayor Mike Rawlings' GrowSouth initiative, and the city already has granted \$4.4 million to help developer Yigal Lelah move forward.

Yet nearly four years after the project was unveiled, not a shovelful of construction dirt has flown. Inexcusable delays linger over issues that should have been resolved long ago.

Depending on how ongoing negotiations conclude among Lelah, the city and the Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Place could help transform a deeply troubled neighborhood.

If communication problems are allowed to persist among the stakeholders, the project could falter. This newspaper urges all sides to keep foremost in mind the benefits that Veterans Place could bring to the surrounding low-income community, the hospital's 3,600 employees and the VA's clientele: thousands of medically needy veterans.

The sprawling hospital campus is ringed by a high fence that minimizes interaction between it and outside residents. Veterans Place was supposed to provide a mix of office space, restaurants, shops, a museum, parking and veteran-friendly apartments designed to boost economic activity and help the hospital blend more integrally with its surroundings.

A DART rail station is dangerously positioned on a traffic median between the two sites. A planned sky-bridge walkway is crucial to help disabled veterans and other pedestrians traverse without having to cross six traffic lanes and two rail lines, as they do now.

Lelah claimed from the beginning that "everything is in place" for his project to proceed, even though he always lacked an absolutely critical component: federal approval. His design calls for the sky bridge to link with the hospital building, but the VA still hasn't agreed to an easement.

Hospital assistant director Eric Jacobsen



SOURCE: ESRI

says the walkway "seemed like a neat idea." From the beginning, however, the hospital has wanted to buy Lelah's property, scrap his development plan and use the land for a badly needed parking lot and ambulatory treatment center. The VA's plan doesn't envision housing, office or retail components.

City housing chief Jerry Killingsworth rejects the VA idea, saying it "doesn't do a damned thing for the city of Dallas." Lelah says he has consistently conveyed that sentiment to the VA.

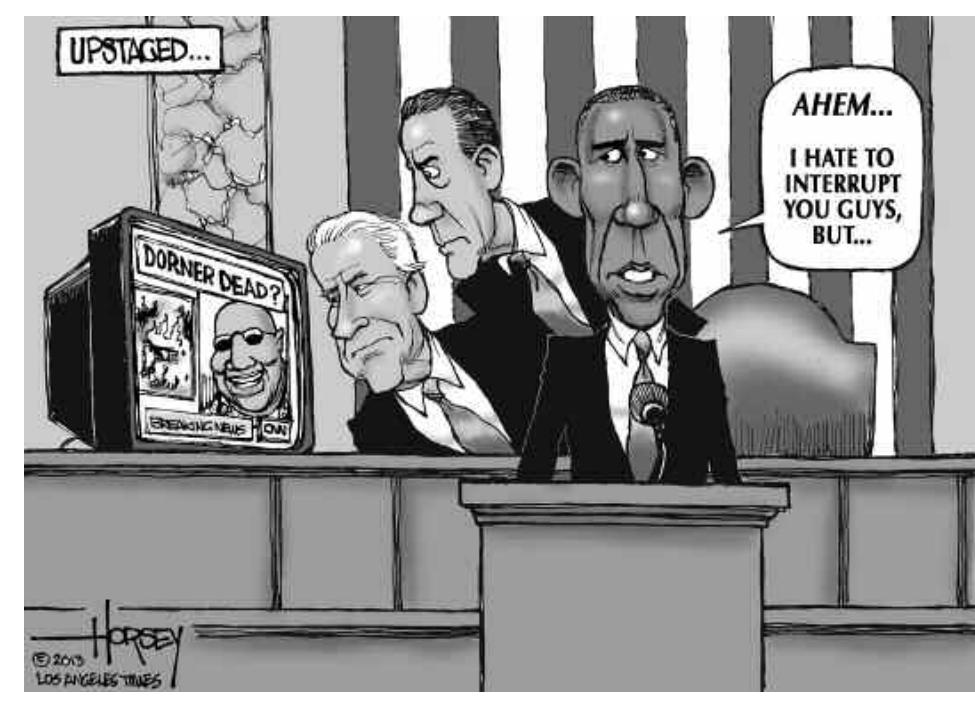
"That's news to us," Jacobsen countered.

The problem is, Lelah must have VA cooperation to fulfill his commitments. He also wants VA co-financing. What happens if the VA doesn't buy in?

Amid years of this back-and-forth, the project has stalled. Something's gotta give. Even though a big question mark hangs over everything, Lelah applied for zoning changes last week so he can start initial construction — with no certainty what the final product will look like.

This situation seems ripe for direct intervention by the mayor and U.S. Rep. Eddie Bernice Johnson, whose congressional district includes these sites.

Please, everyone: Clear away the obstacles, get the dirt flying, and get this project built as it was promised.



David Horsey/Los Angeles Times

LETTERS

Obama wrong on climate

In his State of the Union address Tuesday night, President Obama spoke of a need to respond to climate change issues. "Heat waves, droughts, wildfires and floods — are all now more frequent and intense."

But these claims of weather extremes are false. A review of historical records shows that most temperature records in the U.S. were set in the 1930s, including the all-time warmest year in 1934.

A review of historical records and the testimony of climate scientists indicates that global tropical cyclone activity is near historic lows, the frequency of major U.S. hurricanes has declined, tornados have dramatically declined since the 1950s, wildfires are less frequent, droughts are not historically unusual nor caused by mankind, flooding has not increased, and there is no evidence we are currently having unusual weather.

Unfortunately, many people will assume that because the president made these claims, they must be true. It is disappointing that President Obama didn't check his facts. One wonders how much else he fails to verify before speaking out.

Robert Smith, Dallas/Preston Hollow

3 GOPers wrong on violence

Much is made by our governor about the disconnect between what is happening in Texas and what is being done in Washington.

In that same spirit, let it be noted that while a broad cross section of the citizens of Dallas will be gathering on March 23 at Klyde Warren Park for a rally against domestic violence, both of Texas' U.S. senators voted "No" on the Violence Against Women Act that was passed by a large bipartisan majority.

Much has also been made about the need for the GOP to broaden its appeal to women, yet the one designated to give the response to the President's State of the Union address, U.S. Rep. Marco Rubio of Florida, was also among those who voted against this act.

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives for its consideration. My hope is that those who represent North Texas in Congress will take note of the concerns that will be expressed in Dallas next month and will vote accordingly.

Even more, I hope that the GOP will act on its expressed intention to reach out to women and follow suit.

Stan Hagadone, Coppell

Made to respect each other

Sometimes I find it difficult to fathom that just about 50 years ago, this nation was divided in race. Blacks and whites were still segregated in many aspects of life. Every February, Americans are reminded how far this country has come in terms of racial equality through Black History Month.

Having said that, America still has some way to go to achieve true racial harmony. As a Muslim American, I believe that God has made us into different tribes in order to recognize and respect one another. This is exactly what the Quran stated 1,400 years ago.

I pray America progresses even further in the next 50 years to strengthen racial harmony.

Ahmed Malik, Wylie

@ahmed187

Broken system is doctor-driven

Re: "Parkland-UTSW divide threatens care — Tensions between hospital, med school found to jeopardize patient safety," Sunday news story.

There are three heads to this monster. The third is physicians. They want to be aloof, respected and in charge. They want to do only the enjoyable parts of their job. They want to be paid what they are worth. But health care has become too complex for there to be one master craftsman. And pa-

tients have rights, too.

The Parkland-UTSW divide is a symptom of a sick health care system. Health care is sick because of the power of reimbursement over institutions and physicians. Health care is sick because of physician self-interest and their legal power from state medical practice laws.

Physicians are in charge, but they do not lead. They are not health care team players. There is nothing inside or outside the physician community that ensures physician accountability for their practice or transparency of patient outcomes.

Daniel J. McElroy, Arlington

Support charity, not addictions

Re: "Drive nets \$1.1 million to help Dallas area's needy — Gifts from nearly 19,500 donors will go toward 23 agencies' services," Saturday news story.

Saturday's news about the Dallas Morning News Charities drive made me proud. You are to be commended for helping those of us who care about the less fortunate in our community. Knowing that it is likely to be spent on drugs or booze, I cringe whenever I see a motorist give money to a panhandler in Dallas. Supporting the DMN Charities allows us to drive by panhandlers with a clear conscience knowing we've done what we can to help the less fortunate.

I wish everyone who cares about these people would make an annual donation to the DMN Charities in lieu of handouts to panhandlers that support addictions.

Jack P. Gibson, Dallas

Regulate roofing, too

Re: "Licensing Rids the Shifty — Homeowners need safeguard on foundation repair," Friday Editorials.

Please add roofers to the list of occupations that need regulation.

Dallas area homeowners often deal with a mass of roofers appearing in the area following major, roof-destroying hailstorms. Most offer good service at a fair price. However, some homeowners fall victim to damaging practices by unscrupulous, fly-by-night roofers. In some cases, roofs have been intentionally damaged during the estimate process in order to win work.

These bad actors take advantage of homeowners at their most vulnerable. Because roofers are not subject to basic registration or licensing requirements, homeowners cannot discriminate between a reputable business and a dishonest one.

Texas should follow the actions of other states and adopt requirements for Texas roofers that prohibit abusive practices that prey on homeowners, increase loss and raise insurance costs.

Beaman Floyd, Austin,
Texas Coalition for Affordable
Insurance Solutions, @tcais

Licensing not feasible

You have to be joking about requiring licensing of foundation repair contractors. Texas doesn't even require general contractors and homebuilders to be licensed.

Where y'all from?

Bill Devitt, Plano

Truthful as a judge?

Re: "Jury's foreman laments wrongful conviction case — Man says he wishes he had seen police files, other key evidence during murder trial," Friday news story.

If former Williamson County District Attorney Ken Anderson cannot be truthful about his office not informing the defense about another person being at the scene of a murder, can we really trust any of the decisions he's made while on the bench as a state district judge? I sure wouldn't want him deciding a case in which I was involved.

Steve Blanck, Mesquite

LETTERS & VIEWPOINTS POLICY

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