

Just When I Thought My Time Of Serving Was Over

by Councilwoman Charlotte Farmer

I never would have dreamed that attending the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) meeting this past Monday would have given me such clarity on whether I should seek another term on City Council, but it did! While much has been accomplished over the last nine years and seven months I have served, I clearly saw a whole new aspect of things that must be accomplished. I was thoroughly embarrassed by the conduct of our city employees, acting like bureaucrats, self-seeking and not working on behalf of the very citizens they are to be serving, leaving me in a complete state of shock and a fresh determination.

Numerous constituents from my district are just as concerned as the Santa Rita homeowners, and the neighbors that live off of Hill Street, about the impact of having a frac sand transloading operation in the heart of our city. The damage that it will do on the surrounding properties and our beautiful downtown will be irreversible. How many millions of dollars have we spent to create and enhance the natural beauty that our river and downtown area presents? This just doesn't impact SMD #3 and #5, but everyone who shops, lives, and shares our community and calls San Angelo their home.

San Angelo is a unique and beautiful city because of its natural resources, landmarks, and culture. We pride ourselves on being self-sufficient, strong, and able to take care of ourselves out here on the edge of a desert. That's got to be one of the reasons that San Angelo chose to be a "Home Rule City." Only 25% of the cities in Texas with populations over 5,000 choose such an option.

The concept of home rule is the ***right of citizens at the grassroots level to manage their own affairs with minimum interference from the state. Home rule assumes that governmental problems should be solved at the lowest possible level, closest to the people. Home Rule cities look to the state to tell them what they are prohibited from doing, rather than for specific grants of authority to undertake particular functions. Home Rule cities have the inherent authority to do just about anything that qualifies as a "PUBLIC PURPOSE" and is not contrary to the constitution or laws of the state.***

That being said, what is all this conflict on a frac sand operation about? LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION! The proposed location is simply NOT suited for that type of operation, nor does it honestly fit the zoning already in place on that property.

On ***October 21, 2014***, the City Council was very clear (unanimous) that they did not agree with the conclusion the City Planning department had made concerning the zoning of a frac sand operation for light manufacturing instead of heavy manufacturing

at the applied location. At the same meeting, a citizen came forward and ask for instructions on how to file an official complaint. That following Friday, **October 31, 2014**, the citizens filed their written appeal and asked for a hearing.

The citizens attended the **November 3rd, 2014** ZBA meeting. They were told that the hearing and ruling could be heard on **December 1, 2014 at 1:30 p.m.** The citizens worked and prepared their case to be heard at that meeting, only to be informed at the last minute it would not be possible. I was shocked, and extremely disappointed, by the actions of the City staff at the December 1st meeting. The staff was then informing the citizens that they (the City) must file a public notice and notify all parties of that public meeting and there must be 30 days, etc. etc. This ALL should have been done immediately after the November 3rd meeting.

In addition, the City was then adding a whole new set of requirements about how the Board members were not allowed to drive to the site or even look at other like-kind sites, nor could they review any written material outside of what the City gives to them, and they would not be receiving them until the day of the hearing, etc. etc. Goodness sakes alive! The Supreme Court Justices have more freedom and rights to review documents on which they are about to make decisions that will effect so many lives! Where did this ruling SUDDENLY come from?

This burdensome requirement VIOLATES the Zoning Board of Ordinances requirement that ALL documents concerning an appeal be delivered to the board members immediately. This ruling that light manufacturing encompasses frac sand VIOLATES the NUISANCE aspect of the code. This ruling also VIOLATES OSHA definition of frac sand as a health hazard.

If the City staff does not understand that they work for the citizens of San Angelo, then my job is not finished. I will run again and make it my number one campaign issue, that the City staff, the Bureaucrats, must understand that they work for "we the people" and "we the people" shall determine how our city shall operate and not the City staff.

As good stewards of the citizens' trust in operating our City, the City staff should respond to the citizens in a professional and speedy manner. The City staff should adhere to the ordinances and rules that govern our city, and not create rules as they go along. If they have a problem with a rule or ordinance, then they need to bring it to City Council and let the elected officials that represent the constituents throughout our city settle that matter.

There's work to be done. I'm ready!