

County Rejects Reasons For Reclamation Delays

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A four-year litigation is not reason to postpone reclamation.

After two hours of debate, that was the consensus of the Hardee County Commission and county Planning and Zoning Board.

They asked county attorney Ken Evers to prepare an ordinance demanding Mosaic Fertilizer Inc. present a specific reclamation plan within 90 days.

Mosaic vice-president/engineer Tom Myers gave a power point review of the Fort Meade Mine North Hardee Extension in which no mining has recently occurred or is planned.

He then went on to report on the Fort Green Southern Reserves, Fort Green/Payne Creek Extension and South Rockland North Pasture mines. The biggest controversy was over 734 acres in the Fort Green Southern Reserves which have been mined and still has not begun reclamation.

Myers said that it was a question of material management. The company had planned to use sand tailings from the proposed Ona Mine to complete reclamation in the Fort Green Southern Reserves.

The Ona mine plan has been opposed by several groups from

adjacent counties and is just now beginning to get resolved. The Environmental Resource Permit was approved but is under appeal. Hopefully, that will be complete by mid-summer, Myers said.

The commission/zoning board wanted reclamation to begin within 12 months.

It would take 14 miles of pipe to bring sand tailings from the Four Corners Mine to complete the reclamation south of Fort Green. It would take over 12 months to get that pipe in and begin to bring sand tailings that far, Myers said.

"You're asking us to accept a lot. Where do we draw the line with your reclamation promises? The end of SR 62 going into Manatee County looks like a junk yard. It needs to look better," said Commission Chairman Dale Johnson.

Myers protested, "We have reclaimed some areas ahead of schedule. You don't hear of our successes. We want to be responsive and hope you will be patient for a better project."

He acknowledged that there would be a beneficiation plant in Hardee County in conjunction with the Ona mine, and sand/clay mix would be used in two clay ponds in nearby Manatee County.

After more discussion of

mining and reclamation in Hillsborough, Manatee and Polk counties and plans in Hardee County, Myers concluded his presentation with photos of a host of birds such as egrets and herons rising from a reclaimed marsh area. "We're not sitting on our hands. We will have to move power lines, booster pumps and much else. We want to cooperate, but I just can't promise we can do it within 12 months," he stated.

The final discussion of the evening was on financial accountability. The mining company must show that it has sufficient funds to complete reclamation. Mosaic Assistant Controller Gary Augerson talked about the improved financial picture of the company, the amount of debt from the merger of Cargill and IMC to form Mosaic, how much debt had been paid off and the current international phosphate market.

He said the demand for fertilizer is high because of corn production for development of the alternate fuel ethanol. He asked that the company's financial report be used instead of a bond or corporate guarantee/real estate mortgage.

Myers said the company was the largest pipe line customer in the nation but it is averagely three years from order to receipt of pipe. That is why they must transfer pipeline from Hillsborough County to Hardee for the reclamation put off because of the delay in getting the Ona mine permits. He said it would take time to come up with a more exact plan for alternative reclamation.

The commission/board was not pleased and issued its demand for a specific plan within 90 days.

The zoning board unanimously accepted the financial plan and a reclamation plan within 90 days. The commission approved them on a 4-1 vote, with Commissioner Bobby Smith dissenting.