

Bay Minette landfill eyed

Mayor, council members visit company's project near Atlanta

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BAY MINETTE — The mayor and five-member council of this city traveled to Georgia last month to tour a privately owned landfill serving the Atlanta area, according to several participants.

The company is considering a similar project just off Interstate 65 in north Bay Minette, according to documents and officials, but no application has been filed.

A draft map presented to attendees by GreenFirst of Georgia shows a nearly 1,500-acre facility along I-65, between Ala. 59 and Ala. 287, that could accept municipal solid waste and construction and demolition debris, including hurricane-related trash.

Mayor Jamie Tillery said the property — annexed in December — is already zoned M-1, light manufacturing, so the City Council would play no direct role in approval of a landfill, if an application is ever made.

She said that in those cases the city's Planning Commission approves a site plan and can hold public hearings.

Tillery, who sits on the planning board, said she has no opinion at this time on whether the project should be approved.

"I think they should make a presentation to the city and I will be there to listen," she said.

"It is a privately owned company and privately owned land. I have no idea what they are going to do," Tillery said.

But the officials made the unadvertised trip because "the mayor and council will perform our due diligence," she said. Asked if the gathering could have violated the state's Open Meetings Act, Tillery said, "Not at all."

"No deliberations took place," she said.

Tillery said neither the city nor the company paid for the visit, which also included several members of the Industrial Development Board and North Baldwin Utilities. The company fed the entourage one meal, participants said.

Ernest Kauffman, chief executive officer of GreenFirst of Canton, Ga., said Thursday that no application will be made to the city "in the foreseeable future," if at all.

"We are looking at multiple areas, but that site has interest because it is right off the interstate," Kauffman said.

GreenFirst projects are environmentally friendly, he said, with the Georgia site featuring a stream restoration project. It also includes a commercial and industrial development park, documents show.

The so-called Turkey Run Landfill received the "first municipal solid waste landfill permit to be issued by the state of Georgia in eight years," a company report states. Following permitting, it was sold to Waste Management Inc., according to the report.

Bay Minette City Councilman Johnny Biggs said of the trip: "All we did was take the information."

"We did not deliberate on any of this. We haven't discussed it with each other. We made each other aware not to discuss it," Biggs said. "I wanted to be able to see and smell what a landfill they developed looked like."

Meanwhile, City Attorney Scotty Lewis did not take part, but said the gathering didn't violate the Open Meetings Act because, according to participants, no deliberations took place.

"By definition, certain things don't constitute a meeting. That runs the range of training to social gatherings," Lewis said, adding, "as long as there is no deliberation, it is not considered a meeting."

The Bay Minette group also visited the Hyundai Motor Manufacturing plant near Montgomery, participants said.

"I think it was informational in nature," Lewis said. "They are on the cusp of significant development with industrial prospects like (Hybrid Kinetic) Motors."