

**OFFICIAL PROCEEDINGS OF A PUBLIC HEARING HELD BY  
THE ST. JAMES PARISH COUNCIL ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 24, 2019**

The Council of the Parish of St. James, State of Louisiana, met for a public hearing in the Council Chambers of the Parish Courthouse Annex in Vacherie, LA on Wednesday, July 24, 2019 at 6:00 p.m.

The following were recorded present: Council Members: Alvin St. Pierre, Jason Amato, Ralph Patin, Clyde Cooper, Eddie Kraemer, and Chairman Louque. Councilwoman Vondra Etienne-Steib was not in attendance during roll call.

Chairman Louque called the Public Hearing to order:

**TO HEAR FURTHER PUBLIC INPUT ON THE APPEAL OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S APPROVAL OF WANHUA CHEMICAL US OPERATIONS LLC'S LAND USE PERMIT, ITEM #18-46**

At this time Chairman Louque recapped the procedure that was set at for the public hearing. The appealing party would be allowed 5 minutes to present a summary of their written appeal and supplemental information that was presented; Wanhua would be allowed 5 minutes for their rebuttal to the appeal; and public comment would be limited to 2 minutes each. Chairman Louque indicated since this was a continuance of the public hearing, anyone who spoke at the last public hearing will not be allowed to speak again on this agenda item.

Lisa Jordan, Attorney at the Tulane Environmental Law Clinic, objected to not allowing speakers to speak again and asked for reconsideration. She said, on behalf of Genevive Butler, Pastor Harry Joseph, RISE St. James, and the Louisiana Bucket Brigade, they ask the council today to grant their appeal and deny the Wanhua land use approval. Consideration on the public benefit; physical and environmental impacts of the proposed use on the air, water, and land. The physical and environmental impact exists, and they are in favor of denial. They know that the Wanhua facility (even the MDI phase, which they are applying for) would be a major source of hazardous pollutants less than a mile from Romeville and less than two miles from St. James. The facility will produce and emit phosgene, a poisonous gas for which there is no known safe level of exposure. They know, from Wanhua's own data, that in a worse case scenario, over 12,000 pounds per minutes of phosgene would be released, which she spoke further about and submitted as Exhibit 1. There are definite known impacts and very serious risks to the health, safety, and welfare to the people. She then spoke about the benefits, saying there is still a lot that they don't know, but at this point, we know now, but the Planning Commission did not know that Wanhua applied for a Foreign Trade Zone (FTZ) known internationally as a Free Trade Zone, but for a Foreign Trade Zone status for its facility. This means not only are they exempt from tariffs but that it is exempt from, under the law, from paying inventory taxes. The Planning Commission made its decision about the benefits vs. the costs of this project assuming that something was true. This is why they are alternatively asking, if the council does not grant the appeal and deny the permit today, to remand this to the Planning Commission. They are the body that has the initial decision-making authority and they didn't have key information. If the FTZ board approves the application the parish gets zero inventory taxes. She asked the council to think about the timing and the fact that they didn't know this information, and that the Planning Commission didn't know, adding if we hadn't taken this appeal, the permit would have been final on May 20th. She asked, how much leverage do you think you would have right now, about inventory tax, if they would have already had a permit in hand?

James Newport with Wanhua provided this rebuttal. Wanhua received additional comments in the revised appeal on Monday and they intend to provide written responses to them. He said on their initial review they don't see any pertinent or factual claims that cause any concern by the Parish regarding our project. Wanhua is prepared to build and operate our facility safely and start bringing the benefits to the community as well as work with the Parish and community in on-going work to raise the quality of life for parish residents. Wanhua understands that all the final info that Wanhua provided to the St. James Parish environmental, safety, and health consultant (Ms. Bliss Higgins, of Ramboll, Baton Rouge) was relied upon by the Planning Commission to make their May 20th approval, including the phosgene distribution impact, that was just mentioned.

Pertaining to the appeal itself:

Claim 1, that their MDI Operations would be nearer to the residents than Wanhua led the Planning Commission to believe. Wanhua submitted their preliminary plot plan and original application showing the unit's approximate location and distances to the nearest community of Romeville from the center of the site. Failure scenarios' impact distances from the site boundary to Romeville were provided to assist the Parish in its decision. Also, Unit 1341, that was mentioned, does not contain hazardous materials greater than RQ 1000 pounds.

Claim in Section A(2)(A): that recent information, including Wanhua's inability to fulfill its commitment to buy and hire locally, and status as a Chinese owned company, casts doubt on the Planning Commission's conclusion. Wanhua confirms it intends to recruit, hire, and buy locally, when capable, qualified, and competitive. In fact, Wanhua has already hired locally, however, we cannot initiate significantly recruiting and hiring until we have our land use permit in hand and our air permit in hand. Thirdly, the Mandarin speaking has not and will not be a requirement for hiring local employees. The prior misleading statements and information distributed on Saturday, July 20th, regarding this, was blatant misrepresentation. Mandarin was required for one intern position that would be required to talk to both English and Mandarin speaking individuals. One intern. Wanhua is committed to full compliance of all of the Parish's ordinances, including the Planning Commission resolution, including agreements that we want to enter into with the Parish regarding paid inventory tax. We will pay the inventory tax, and applicable future federal, state, and local regulations. Wanhua met very many interested and local contractors and individuals at the two open houses in

June. Wanhua has established a website, [www.wanhuaus.com](http://www.wanhuaus.com) for anyone, particularly those interested in being a supplier, contractor, or employee so they can, and should submit their interest and comments to Wanhua via this website.

Claim in Section A(2)(B): that Wanhua's status is partially owned by the People's Republic of China alters its cost/benefit, such that the costs are greater than the benefits. Wanhua is not owned by the People's Republic of China Central Government. Wanhua Chemical US Operations and Wanhua Chemical US Holding are US companies and are being managed by a US Board of Directors, as per its incorporation bylaws. Wanhua Chemical's Board of Directors members are Wanhua employees. The ultimate parent, the Wanhua Chemical Group, Wanhua China, is not owned by the Central Government of China either. Wanhua China is a public traded company, meaning it has Shanghai Stock Exchange based shareholders and is managed by a Board of Directors, both independent Board of Directors and Wanhua Board of Directors, whose roll is to maximize shareholder value and ensure that the company operates in compliance and responsibly. It has a very diversified ownership structure which will be in our written comments that we submit later. Wanhua China's largest shareholder is a company in Yantai City, China. The Louisiana Convent Project decision was made by a Board of Directors and it was market based.

He then addressed phosgene: the claim was that the Parish must obtain more information about the potential impacts of a phosgene release. Wanhua provided a detailed section on the potential impacts of phosgene, an accidental release of phosgene, in the phosgene safety section of the supplemental information submitted and dated on May 13, 2019. This information was again reviewed by the Parish's environmental consultant. Wanhua stands by all the information that was provided and will address point by point claims in their written responses.

In closing, we have asked the Parish Council to delay a vote that was planned for tonight to address these issues that have arisen recently regarding the Foreign Trade Zone and work out our agreement with the Parish to pay that tax. We have asked for a two-week extension until August 7<sup>th</sup>.

The following made public comments:

1. Shedrick Grant, 1733 77<sup>th</sup> Ave, Baton Rouge, LA
2. Adrienne Oatis, 1501 Frank St. Donaldsonville, LA
3. Lonnie Rhone, 1967 North St. #26, Baton Rouge, LA
4. John Carville, 10253 Hillyard Ave, Baton Rouge, LA
5. Lela Mae Wilkes, 7808 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge, LA
6. Russell Wilkes, 7808 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge, LA

Councilwoman Etienne-Steib arrived and assumed her seat on the council.

7. Michael Miller, 7808 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge, LA
8. Ronnie Anderson, 7808 Airline Highway, Baton Rouge, LA
9. Clinton Alfunso, 1528 Mary Lee Drive, Denham Springs, LA
10. Nickie Monica, 6052 Government St., Baton Rouge, LA
11. Sharon Lavigne, 8581 Hwy 18, St. James, LA
12. Rev. Harry Joseph, 10627 Hwy 18, St. James, LA
13. Rita Cooper, 8190 King View St., St. James, LA
14. Michael Pernici, 7760 Willow Grove Blvd., Baton Rouge, LA
15. Lee Wingard, 96 Fountainebleau Dr., New Orleans, LA (gave his time to Kimberly Terrell, she presented documentation)

At this time Chairman Louque informed everyone that anyone who spoke at the previous public hearing would be allowed to speak on the new information presented.

16. Myrtle H. Felton, 8222 Pleasant Hill, Romeville, LA
17. Gail LeBeouf, 758 N. Ezidore St., Gramercy, LA
18. Barbara Washington, 8191 Pleasant Hill St., Convent, LA
19. Linda Prudhomme (Port of South LA), 1912 Madewood Rd, LaPlace, LA
20. Brenda Huguet, 633 LA 44, Convent, LA
21. David O'Leary, 4615 Carondelet St., New Orleans, LA

After determining there was no additional business to come before the council, the meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

  
Linda Hubbell, Secretary