

Carpinteria Council Adopts Resolution Against Paredon Project

Concerns about Venoco's proposed slant-drilling operation center on accountability

Giani Magnoli, Noozhawk, 3-9-10

While the city of Carpinteria can't use public funds to take sides in a campaign, it adopted a formal resolution Monday night opposing Venoco Inc.'s Paredon project.

The City Council voted 4-1 to take an opposing position on Measure J, the Paredon Oil and Gas Development Initiative, though it has no effect on the initiative process.

Reasons for opposition are centered on accountability. Because of the initiative process, the project doesn't have to undergo the same environmental review process required through the California Environmental Quality Act or be subject to a city environmental impact report.

Other reasons included interference with the city's self-rule, the questionable authority to change aspects of the project after the election, and the economic threat of an oil spill or other accident. The city has, however, prepared reports on the effects of Measure J, including environmental impacts.

The analysis concluded that the proposed project "shares enough similarities with the original Paredon project that staff has determined that the proposed final EIR contained sufficient info to allow an estimate of the likely impacts."

The comparison showed the project to have the same or greater impacts than the original project in most categories, including air quality, marine mammals, land use and others.

Unanswered questions, including the amount of royalties the city would receive and the ongoing court battle between Carpinteria and Venoco, also are in the mix.

About \$300,000 in, the city lost its lawsuit attempting to invalidate the ballot measure and it's now in the appellate court system.

The City Council voted unanimously to put the item on the June 8 ballot, but the only other option was to approve the project outright.

Adding an onshore drilling rig near Venoco's existing facility would allow access to oil and natural gas from the Santa Barbara Channel without another offshore platform. Since onshore drilling is prohibited by the city now, the initiative includes amending the General Plan and Coastal Plan.

The biggest opponent to the project, besides the City Council, has been Citizens of Paredon. Former Carpinteria Mayor Donna Jordan has led the charge, saying the project's proposed location and questionable accountability are worrisome.