RISE St. James

Eric Wolverton
Planning & Permitting Supervisor

Glen Millet
Chairman, St. James Planning Commission

Alvin St. Pierre
Chairman, St. James Parish Council

November 28, 2018

Dear Sirs:

The St. James Parish Code states that the residents have the right to appeal the Planning Commission’s decision approving FG LA, LLC’s proposal for land use within 30 days from the date of the decision. Because the Planning Commission approved FG LA’s proposal on October 30th, the residents have until November 29th to file an appeal with the Planning Commission per Section 86-37(m) of the St. James Parish Code. This letter serves as that appeal for the following three reasons:

(1) Whether the impacts would be substantially different from the impacts of allowable uses for the district, which includes air emissions, noise, traffic, effect on property values, etc.;

RISE St. James and residents of the parish question the residential/future industrial classifications of the 2014 Land Use Plan.

(2) Public benefits of proposed use and
(3) Physical and environmental impacts with particular attention to whether the public benefits are commensurate with those impacts.

When the vote was taken, the chair of the commission stated that “public benefits outweigh the impacts.” However, the hearing that preceded the vote did not detail those public benefits. Only a single speaker, the FG LA public relations staff member, spoke in favor of the facility and she did not provide detail on the public benefits. In fact, in referencing hotels for out of town workers, she confirmed that FG LA does not plan to hire locally.

JOBS

There is a presumed jobs benefit to the parish, but the Advocate newspaper story about the project emphasized that workers would come from outside of the parish. The story said that
a. Housing would be built for temporary construction workers: “Less than an hour and a half after the FG LA announcement was made, Roussel said someone reached out to him with interest in buying the center for $1.2 million and turning it into a dormitory to house construction workers.”

b. Workers would come from other states and cities: “To fill jobs at the plant, FG LA will draw workers from as far away as Lafayette and Hancock County, Mississippi, Hecht said.”

HEALTH AND LOSS OF PROPERTY

In contrast, St. James residents detailed the potential harm of the facility and the ongoing pollution burden from existing plants. Pastors, a retiree from parish government, educators, and other community members noted the following problems from the current facilities:

- Skin rashes
- Difficulty breathing
- Eye irritation
- Cancer
- Inability to grow gardens because of the poor soil, air and water
- Lack of a future in the parish for young people who don’t want to live among toxic facilities; youth will move away and the community of St. James will die.

FLOODING

The FG LA site will pave over sugar cane fields that absorb water and act as drainage. The Planning Commission failed to discuss this issue. At a minimum the parish should have requested that the Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA) assess how the fill for FG LA will worsen flooding in the area.

CPRA’s “St James -Vacherie” project is part of the State Master Plan for 2017. The planning commission should also ask CPRA to review the FG LA project in light of its removal of wetland benefits from the Ama Diversion project. CPRA should assess the increased costs to this project due to the fill of wetlands.

POLLUTION AND CLIMATE CHANGE

FG LA’s permit applications detail that it will release over 23 million pounds of air pollution. Much of that is greenhouse gases that will contribute to climate change. The Trump Administration released a National Climate Assessment, a 1,656 page document detailing how such emissions will harm our economy, public health, coastlines and our infrastructure resulting
in millions and billions of dollars of losses. FG LA’s emissions would exacerbate this situation, a
dire problem for St. James.

TAX EXEMPTIONS

FG LA would receive an estimated $1.5 billion in tax credits, much of which would otherwise go
to fund much-needed public services in St. James Parish, like schools, hospitals, and police.

PLASTIC POLLUTION

FG LA is proposing to manufacture plastic. Plastic pollution in the Mississippi River and the Gulf
of Mexico is a growing problem.\textsuperscript{iii} Ocean plastic pollution has been documented in seafood
essential to Louisiana’s economy and culture, such as clams, oysters, and fish.

Recycling will not solve the plastic pollution problem. Despite years of advertising and
infrastructure development, Louisiana’s recycling rate is only 6% - a drop from previous years.\textsuperscript{iv}

There was no discussion by the planning commission weighing any of these harms in the
context of the public purpose.

(4) Vested property rights and other constitutional protections.

We have lived in St. James for generations, and FG LA threatens to force us out for many
reasons, including the sheer volume of pollution. We will not be able to enjoy our property – no
more gardens or picnics or barbeques. These activities are already limited by the ongoing
pollution. What’s more, while industrial property values may rise, our property values are
plummeting because FG LA will destroy the quality of life for residents of the parish.

There is also a significant question of equal protection before the law. FG LA is slated for the 5\textsuperscript{th}
district, the district with the highest percentage of African Americans in the parish. The burden
of industry and pollution is very clearly falling on the black community. This is a clear civil rights
violation as well as a public relations nightmare for the parish.

On the night of the commission’s vote, I submitted a petition with 537 signatures of local
residents who oppose the facility. Please know that we stand together in this appeal.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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\underline{Sharon Lavigne}\vspace{1mm}
Director, RISE St. James
8581 Hwy 18
St. James, LA 70086
sharonclavigne@gmail.com
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Cc:

Timmy Roussel, President, St. James Parish
Jason Amato, Council member, St. James Parish
Ryan Louque, Council member, St. James Parish
Ralph Patin, Council member, St. James Parish
Clyde Cooper, Council member, St. James Parish
Vondra Etienne-Stelb, Council member, St. James Parish
Eddie Kraemer, Council member, St. James Parish
Louisiana NAACP
Congressional Black Caucus
Pam Spees, Center for Constitutional Rights
Bill Quigley, Loyola Law School
Lisa Jordan, Tulane Environmental Law Clinic
Lucia Blacksher, Tulane Civil Rights Law Clinic
Blake Kopcho, Center for Biological Diversity
Adrienne Bloch, Earthjustice
General Russel Honore, GreenARMY

2 Ibid.