Prison consultant pulls out of project

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PINE PRAIRIE — The meeting room of the Pine Prairie Village Council was filled to capacity Thursday night with members of the People’s Opposition to the Proposed Detention Center who wanted to get their views across to the council, but much of the fire was taken from their argument before spokesperson Della Fontenot addressed the council.

At the start of discussion on the topic Village Attorney Raymond Lejeune read aloud a letter that the council had just received from Earl Randolph, a consultant with Southern Correctional Consultants, Inc. The Lafayette-based firm was responsible for helping Water District I and the Village of Pine Prairie attempt to construct a jail facility in the Pine Prairie area.

The Water District dropped out of the venture in January when the People’s Opposition presented them with a petition of over 400 signatures of people who didn’t want the facility constructed. Southern Correctional Consultants was then contacted by a group of local investors who expressed an interest in partially financing the project.

At the February council meeting, Randolph showed up unexpectedly to discuss whether or not Pine Prairie desired to continue with the project. Because Randolph wasn’t on the agenda, no action on the matter was taken.

In the letter that Randolph wrote to the council, and Lejeune read aloud, he stated that following the February meeting his company received a phone call from one of the members of the investment group “verbally chastizing us in no uncertain terms for talking to the Pine Prairie Council without going through their group.”

“We have a quiet town here where everyone knows one another and feels safe. We don’t want, and I don’t think the town council wants that to happen, we don’t want to force our own people out of their homes.”

“We’re here tonight to say that we don’t want this prison,” Fontenot continued. “We’ll support any kind of industry, but not a prison.”

In other action, the council heard from the Village Engineer, who gave a report on the progress of the sewer program and handed out sample ordinances concerning sewer line hook-ups.

The council also heard from Al Ardoin, the Solid Waste Commissioner, who gave his report.

The person informed SCCI that if they “did not use their group for the financing that he could assure us that there would be no prison built in the Pine Prairie area.”

In light of these events, Randolph wrote that SCCI feels that it “must at least temporarily withdraw from the project.”

That revelation seemed to take a bit of the fire from the People’s Opposition group. Spokesperson Della Fontenot was still given her right to present her group’s views.

“Whether the prison is built here in town or ten miles from here,” she told the council, “we don’t want it. We find Oakdale is too close.”