

Holtec, ELEA court Jal council

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JAL — In an attempt to fill an information void, a Holtec International representative met with the Jal City Council Thursday, but it may have been too little, too late — for now.

The council unanimously approved a resolution in late May opposing interim storage of spent nuclear fuel. The resolution is non-binding since the proposed site is about 40 miles northwest of Jal, although concerns have been raised because area railroad tracks could be used to transport spent nuclear fuel.

Holtec International applied to the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission last year to build a \$2.4 billion interim consolidated storage facility, called HI-STORE, located in Lea County near the Eddy County line. The Eddy-Lea Energy Alliance, which owns the 1,000-acre property, is comprised of representatives from Lea and Eddy counties and the cities of Hobbs and Carlsbad.

Waste Control Specialists in Gaines County, Texas, about five miles east of Eunice, also is pursuing a similar application for its location near the New Mexico state line. Both require NRC license approval.

Jal Mayor Stephen Aldridge said Holtec contacted him after the council's resolution requesting an opportunity to present their plan.

“They were given that and they were treated well,” Aldridge said. “They did a good job with their presentation. I think there’s still more work to do.”

Jal City Councilman Mike Orr said his mind is not changed even after Holtec’s Camden, N.J.-based vice president of communications Joy Russell, accompanied by ELEA vice president John Heaton of Carlsbad, spent almost two hours outlining the company’s plan and answering councilors’ questions.

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“(Thursday), I asked the public to just look, listen and learn and let the council ask questions,” he said, “and we’d try to get Holtec and ELEA to commit to a town hall meeting so the general public could express themselves and ask questions they had.”

Aldridge said Thursday’s meeting was designed to avoid a contentious atmosphere.

“When you mention nuclear waste, especially high level, first you’re going to get an emotional response from people just because of the matter they’re dealing with,” the mayor said. “That makes it difficult because it’s emotion and there’s a tendency for crowds to be a little raucous. I think they (Holtec)