

## City urges power plant impact study

By *CONNIE PARISH, Times Staff Writer*

After a lengthy presentation by environmental experts and a group opposing the construction of two coal-fired power plants, Leavenworth city commissioners agreed this week to urge the Army Corps of Engineers to order an Environmental Impact Statement.

Because of information gleaned during the study session, commissioners agreed to specifically request an EIS with a health-risk assessment. They also intend to cite specific concerns, such as mercury and ozone pollution and possible water pollution.

Mayor Brian Grittmann asked city manager Gary Ortiz to draft the letter for their perusal at the next meeting. Copies of the letter will also be sent to the Environmental Protection Agency, the Kansas Department of Health and Environment, the Missouri Department of Natural Resources and the Concerned Citizens of Leavenworth for Quality Living.

It will also go to elected officials, including the three county commissioners and Rep. Candy Ruff, D-Leavenworth, all of whom attended Tuesday's study session.

Brendan Sheehan of the concerned citizens' group had previously asked commissioners for the action. Commissioners had agreed to review the issue in a study session but they wanted to have all sides present.

Several representatives were available from EPA, KDHE and Great Plains Energy, the company proposing two plants in the area. Preliminary plans call for one plant across the river in Missouri, near the Weston Bend Park. The other one is proposed north of what is known as the Kickapoo Bottoms across the Atchison County line.

Great Plains Energy representative Roger Randall said, "At this point a decision has not been made whether we will build the power plants, either as a merchant plant or a native load plant."

He expects the decision to come during the third quarter of the company's year.

A merchant plant sells power to other states across the country. A native load plant provides electricity for the state in which it is located. Ruff had noted earlier that an older plant in La Cygne is "not in good shape" and might close.

Members of the citizens' group were skeptical that Great Plains had not made a decision yet. Several had relatives in the Atchison area who've received \$10,000 as part of the company's option to buy the land, one woman said.

Vic Cooper, a representative of KDHE, said Great Plains has submitted only one of eight permits that would be necessary in Kansas. That has to do with air -- prevention of significant deterioration -- and when KDHE completes the review, a public hearing is scheduled within 30 days.

KDHE hasn't finished the review and has requested additional information which it hasn't yet received. Some reviews take up to 18 months to two years, Cooper said. One application for a permit has been submitted in Missouri, dealing with wetlands disturbance, he said.

Joe Cothorn explained the process he's works with for EPA, involving compliance with the National

Environmental Policy Act. Cothorn said the move has been away from Environmental Impact Statements to lesser analyses, partly because EPA regulations have become stricter. The technology to mitigate problems is also more sophisticated.

But members of the citizens' group said they weren't satisfied with anything less than an Environmental Impact Statement because of the possible health risks posed by the plants. They often deferred to a representative they'd invited to speak, Craig Volland of Kansas City, Mo., who said he'd done extensive environmental research.

He cited several concerns, particularly the chances of mercury and ozone pollution and particulate matter.

"Normally the mercury travels far away," Volland said, "but in the presence of ozone it acts quickly and has the ability to drop out much more quickly."

Volland said mercury in fish also becomes a problem for pregnant women who may eat a lot of seafood.

"There's more of a problem here with two plants side by side," he said, especially in conjunction with the existing Iatan plant.

"We can't say for sure it'll cause greater health problems, but they can't tell you it won't," Volland said, noting environmental agencies have refused to require ozone modeling of the impact of the three plants.

The citizens' group initially asked commissioners to write the EPA to pressure the Corps of Engineers to get an Environmental Impact Statement. But Cothorn said one federal agency can't force another federal agency to do anything.

He suggested commissioners make the request to the Corps of Engineers, while providing a copy of the request to EPA officials.

Bill Griffith, a Leavenworth County resident who heads the Kansas chapter of the Sierra Club, said they wanted an Environmental Impact Statement "because we feel the monitoring would be more thorough."

Even though it is an "open-ended process," a point Cothorn had made, "we feel it could lead to more questions and answers."