

SAN ANTONIO CURRENT | 9/8/2010

## THE QUEUE

## The Queue - September 8, 2010

by Current news team

**CPS sunshine**

Now that **CPS Energy** is dishing so much sunshine to the *Express-News* (telling them, for instance, that the City-owned utility spent **\$6.1 million** extracting itself from 50-percent ownership in two planned nuclear reactors at the South Texas Project in Matagorda County to today's 7.6-percent status; confirming a range upper-management sorts are paid pro-sports-type figures; and admitting to ambitions for **Future-Is-Now** spider robots to serve espresso syrup to its executive staff through fiber-optic wires), the Queue is left wondering about all our OUR denied past open records requests.

Looking back to 2007, we tally them around 16, though there are probably a few we missed.

To rehash some of our questions and their responses, consider:

- Is it the business of local residents which companies are using the most electricity generated by our City-owned utility? CPS told us no.
- The list of **top-paid employees** the E-N recently ran? We asked for that in both 2008 and 2009 and were denied all but the top tier.
- We wanted to know in October of 2007 how much the utility had spent on **nuclear development** at the STP nuclear complex. Nothing doing.
- Conversations between the City's **Office of Environmental Policy** and CPS related to setting of efficiency goals and renewable-energy targets were considered "competitive information" and also



denied us.

While we'll make a point to revisit some of these topics given the new spirit of openness being celebrated across town, it's perhaps more pressing to ask where the itemized budget promised by CPS officials in front of the full council last rate-hike is right now (as **Energia Mia** member Cynthia Wheeler questions in this week's Saytown Lowdown, See Sacurrent.com).

But, heck, even when our power provider does play it open-like, the public doesn't always rouse itself. When we reported in April 2009 that CPS was actively paying lobbyists to fight off **federal cap-and-trade legislation**, and hence bring on the worst of global warming expected to punish the poor far more than those who can afford to "adapt" to a hotter world of pricier food and more scarce clean water, all we got was a tsk-tsk from the then-campaigning **Mayor Julián**

**Castro** and not so much as a light dusting of political fallout.

However, we're optimistic about noises coming from the solar side of the room. With CPS Energy, **Solar San Antonio**, the City of San Antonio, Bexar County, and the growing roster of solar businesses pooling their talents in the "**Bring Solar Home**" effort, we're expecting bright, pollution-free arrays to increasingly define our city.

Our West Texas neighbors in Marfa's Eastside neighborhood of **Sal Si Puedes** will also be happy our partner **Tessera Solar** backed out of a deal with CPS for 27 megawatts recently. Some art-town-on-the-prairie types were getting fidgety about the solar complex and how much hum would be emitted from those big dishes, which in all likelihood would have evolved into yet another **minimalist art installation** in the high desert drawing tourists dollars to the town's less-developed back door. •

### 'Orphanage' on ropes

As the **Wild Animal Orphanage** works to find new homes for its hundreds of charges — tigers, bears, monkeys — those doing the relocation work are expressing concern about the condition of the animals held there and how **various illnesses** may affect their relocation chances.

According to a June USDA inspection report, buried among a string of "repeat" violations was a note about feeding. The large carnivores did not have any meat on site. While some chicken arrived during the inspection, it "was not of sufficient quality or nutritive value for all the large cats." While that could lead to problems over time, more immediate illnesses lurk. **Macaque monkeys** purposefully injected with **hepatitis** in research labs before finding shelter in Northwest Bexar County, for instance, will need specially trained and permitted handlers to care for them.

For those of you who've been sleeping through the local news cycle, the *Current* reported on its blog Sunday that the long-troubled WAO at the edge of Northwest San Antonio has decided to close its doors. A formal press release is expected this week.

"Due to our overpopulation, [and the fact that] we don't have the ability to care for the animals in the manner that we would prefer, we've decided to dissolve the orphanage and find new homes [for the animals]," WAO secretary Suzanne Straw told the QueQue on Saturday. "WAO is cooperating with the Texas Office of the Attorney General's Charitable Trust Division in their ongoing investigation of WAO. That's been going on for many years and we're partnering with them on how to best handle the situation. They have not put any demand on us. But even for a couple of months before this vote was cast, we were in the process of finding homes for as many of our animals as we could."

While a *Current* writer had to absorb many bracing insults online for suggesting a week ago the sanctuary was most likely on the edge of abandon, the pain will certainly be soothed when all those TV news reports open with "first reported by the *San Antonio Current* ..."

The WAO holds roughly 400 animals. While Straw told the QueQue that most of the animals have been moved (or are in the process of being relocated), sources involved in that process are saying very few, if any, have been moved yet. That only about one-third have been "potentially" placed. One would think the WAO board would be taking all the help it can get. Strangely, a videographer with **Hollywood connections** offered to record the passage of some animals from San Antonio to Indiana. Instead of welcoming the help in putting the message out there, the board, according to **filmmaker Billy McNamara**, agreed during a conference call last week to allow him to videotape a transfer — for a fee.

"They basically said, if you want to do a rescue you have to give us money. Or else you can't," McNamara told the QueQue this week. When he offered to pay for the cost of transporting the animals to a rescue in Indiana, the board circled round to McNamara's Hollywood-based **celebrity sponsor**. "They said he's got deep pockets, he should be able to get us some money. ... Basically, that's extortion."

So much for the animals.

While Straw said they are working with many USDA-approved facilities to transport as many of the animals as possible, she pledged WAO would stay open until "every single animal has been found a new home."

Groups offering to lend a hand so far, reportedly include Kendalia's **Wildlife Rescue & Rehabilitation**, a New

Mexico zoo, Jungle Friends Primate Sanctuary, Chimp Haven, and **Montana Grizzly Encounter**, among others. Meanwhile, the **Global Federation of Animal Sanctuaries** is considering pooling a group of large donors to purchase the sanctuary outright so that those animals that are too sick to transport “would not be betrayed again” by we humans. Patty A. Finch, executive director of GFAS, said a quasi-investment deal could offer returns to donors even, if structured right. (Overloaded with well-meaning capital? Contact her at [patty@sanctuaryfederation.org](mailto:patty@sanctuaryfederation.org).)

Legal wrangling at WAO continued up to the day before the Aug. 31 board vote to dissolve, with a settlement offer presented by the attorney for former owners **Ron and Carol Asvestas**. The offer suggested they would withdraw a 2009 lawsuit in exchange for being reinstated at their former \$100,000 salaries and 11 months of lost wages.

While that opportunity seems to have gone by the wayside, the organization is still accepting donations to feed the animals until they are relocated, Straw said. “As far as donations go, we definitely need donations to keep on feeding the animals. Our goal is to find homes within **60 days**. If we need to extend that goal, so be it, until we find homes for every animal. In the meantime, we need food, veterinary care, transport, and gas. ... We’ll continue to fundraise, but ideally we’d like to find a non-profit organization that will receive donations on our behalf and disperse them as needed.” •

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