

Air board hearing

Official tells of industrial accord on Bayport

By HAROLD SCARLETT
Post Environment Writer

The developers of Bayport indicated to Seabrook city officials in 1972 that no manufacturing plants would be allowed in a section of the industrial complex nearest Galveston Bay, a Seabrook city councilman testified Tuesday.

Councilman Joe M. Pirtle said it was with this understanding that Seabrook approved an agreement that year designating the area as an industrial district.

"THEY INDICATED no manufacturing plants to the east of Texas 146 — only shipping and storage," Pirtle testified.

The Seabrook councilman was called as an opposition witness in a Texas Air Control Board hearing on whether to permit construction of a \$100 million BFGoodrich chemical plant in the eastern section of Bayport.

About a dozen bayshore citizen organ-

izations and communities, including Seabrook, are opposing the Goodrich plant.

Pirtle's testimony, however, will not be a part of the hearing record. It was allowed by hearing examiner John B. Turney only for a bill of exception that could be used in a later court appeal of the case.

TURNEY RULED THAT the background of the industrial district agreement was not relevant, as a legal matter, to air board consideration of the case.

This set off a long and bitter argument from opponents of the plant, several of whom are acting as their own attorneys.

Friday, the air board approved construction of an American Hoechst Corp. chemical plant next to the Goodrich site in the same Bayport section.

Air board chairman John Blair told bayshore opponents of both plants that his vote was strongly influenced by the

fact that the Hoechst plant would be in an area designated as an industrial district by both Seabrook and Pasadena.

In his testimony Tuesday, however, Pirtle said the 1972 industrial district agreement resulted from a bitter, three-way annexation battle among Seabrook, Pasadena and Houston.

HE SAID NEGOTIATION and compromise was necessary to end a situation in which some property owners were getting tax bills from all three cities.

"We felt it (the industrial district agreement) was the lesser of two evils," Pirtle said, "and would avoid long and costly litigation with the world's largest industrial corporation."

Bayport is a project of the Friendswood Development Co., which is a subsidiary of the Exxon Co.

Pirtle said he would never have signed the agreement with Friendswood if he

had known it would lead to plants like Goodrich's.

He said in Seabrook zoning terms, "heavy industry" refers to "heavy truck and boat sales."

THE AIR BOARD permit hearing, which began Jan. 31, went into its fifth week Tuesday at the Seabrook Community Center.

Another opposition witness, environmental specialist Stennie Meadours, testified the Goodrich plant site is in an area that has been a habitat for the endangered Houston toad.

She said construction of the plant would eliminate all wildlife from the piece of native coastal prairie.

Siting of the plant in Bayport areas west of Texas 146, Meadours testified, would protect an irretrievable coastal area and do much less damage environmentally.