

Dec. 17, 2018

Bella Vista Trafalgar Road Stump Dump statement from Mayor Peter Christie

I would like for residents, especially those who are impacted deeply by this fire situation, to understand that just because the city's firefighters are not out at the stump dump site with a water hose doesn't mean the city is not doing our part to help resolve this situation as quickly as possible, or that the city is not concerned about the health and well-being of our residents.

I would also like to be sure the residents understand that the city is **not** in charge here. This is a delicate environmental situation that is beyond our means. We do not have the resources or the expertise to put the fire out, and we are relying on the state and federal agencies who are in existence for that exact purpose. When a plan is put in place, we do not have the money to pay the millions it will most likely cost. I want the residents of this city to have accurate expectations from your city government.

The Fire Chief met on Friday with representatives from the ADEQ, the Arkansas Health Department, the EPA and their experts to evaluate the fire and make a recommendation on its remediation. The meeting was arranged by the ADEQ, and the property owner was not present. Per the EPA, several recommendations will be presented, then the best method for putting the fire out will be decided on and presented to the property owner. The ADEQ confirmed again at the meeting that **the property owner has primary responsibility for fixing this situation.**

We received a copy of the report this afternoon, which included three options for extinguishing the fire – the insertion of an inert gas underground, a foam or chemical treatment and the excavation of the material, which would then be doused in water. Each has its pros and cons, and the report can be found on the city's website for you to read. While they did line out these options, there has yet to be a decision made on a plan. Congressman Womack visited the site this afternoon to see first-hand what is happening, and I am scheduled to be on another call with state and federal legislators this Friday, following the release of the third round of air quality testing. The purpose of these calls is to keep pushing for action and to hopefully find a funding source to solve this problem.

It was reaffirmed at the meeting Friday that it is not feasible for the city's Fire Department to put water on the fire, until proper retention and environmental protection methods are put in place. The Fire Chief also addressed questions regarding the containment of the fire, and told the representatives from these agencies that the fire is contained underground at this time, and if there is any threat of the fire spreading, fire personnel will take action. The Fire Department and Arkansas Forestry Department are still in talks regarding establishing a fire break perimeter around the edges of the fire.

I am aware there has been rampant misinformation circulating via social media. For instance, this fire was not burning prior to July of this year. Also, there has not been additional debris brought in and burned, but rather the same underground fire continues to burn and smoke. I

would encourage residents not to believe everything they hear or see, and to be sure to go to the source for correct information. The city will continue providing updates we get directly from the state and federal level on the city's website as we receive them. Please check the website for the most accurate information.

As we saw over this past weekend, the weather has a great effect on the level of smoke and odor in the air. This is like a living, breathing thing that responds to its environment. The cool, moist air keeps the smoke hanging low and the smell high. This is why in the morning hours the valley looks full of a smoky fog and by afternoon little smoke can be seen. Rainy days soak the ground, and then the water takes 24 hours or so to infiltrate the fire, making it burn less efficiently and smoke more.

I implore residents to contact the Arkansas Health Department with health concerns, as that is the agency that deals with public health issues, and to adhere to the recommendations their experts provide.

I know residents have been using their own systems to monitor the air quality. Since we at the city are not air quality experts, we sought some information this afternoon from the Arkansas Department of Health regarding these monitors. This data is hugely impacted by other environmental factors, such as humidity, and the ADH said these readings are not typically considered accurate and usually run high. Any time any kind of particle passes through the detector, an algorithm guesses what that particle is. That means each water molecule that passed through was counted as a particulate. The ADH urged us to remind residents that this is not validated, quality-controlled data, and this is not information they would use to make health calls.

However, they did say with certainty that a quality air filtration system is a much better investment. They said an air monitoring system will alert you of conditions and do nothing more than cause anxiety, while a filtration system will actually be working to filter the air you are breathing.

This fire is not something your city officials or staff are taking lightly. They have spent countless hours working toward a solution to this problem with tied hands. As it is important you seek out the Health Department for health concerns, it's equally important you seek out the regulatory authority over this situation with other issues and concerns you have. The ADEQ is overseeing this process. They have the rules that need to be followed, and the methods to enforce those. They are to whom inquiries should be directed. Residents can find contact information for the ADEQ and the Health Department on the city's website.