

Madison Food Park slaughterhouse remains threat to community

Protect the Falls

It's been several years since the Madison Food Park Slaughterhouse (MFP) was proposed, yet this threat still looms over Great Falls and Cascade County residents, our clean water, and our health. In September, the Cascade County Zoning Board gave MFP's proponent - Mr. Friesen - a two year extension to the still-pending Special Use Permit application. The silence surrounding MFP does not mean the proposal is dead and we should let our guard down. Rather, everyone who cares about Great Falls' rich history, way of life, and outdoor recreation should remain vigilant, for our community will be forever changed if it becomes a slaughterhouse town.

The MFP Slaughterhouse would be a 3,000-acre industrial-scale facility situated eight miles upstream of Great Falls and just six miles from the city's drinking water source, the Missouri River. The impacts on the region's water quantity and quality would be severe, consuming 3.5 million gallons of water from the Madison Aquifer and discharging thousands of gallons of dangerous wastewater each day, threatening pollution to downstream creeks and fisheries, the recreational opportunities they support, and our drinking water supplies. In fact, eight of the twenty largest waterway polluters in the Nation are industrial slaughterhouses.

The sheer enormity of waste produced by MFP is also notable. The slaughterhouse would process approximately 132,400 animals weekly, including 9,900 hogs, 2,500 cattle, and 120,000 chickens, resulting in staggering volumes of waste per week. Solid and liquid waste from industrial-scale slaughterhouses produce noxious odors that would significantly degrade air quality and the aesthetics of our downwind Great Falls community.

Traditional agriculture and ranching runs deep in Montana, but sadly, MFP would compete against and likely dis-

place small-scale, family-owned farming and ranching with industrial, concentrated feedlots. Instead of inviting corporate take-overs and foreign investors, we should be carrying forth the already-present momentum of mobile slaughterhouses and community-scale butcher shops that connect local producers and supplies.

Cascade County citizens should be staunch opponents of MFP as it poses serious health impacts, economic, and social consequences. Increased exposure to viruses, bacteria, and wastes, decreased property values, medical service shortfalls, housing shortages, overcrowded school systems, traffic influx, and road infrastructure deterioration are common issues in slaughterhouse towns across the country. The exciting new small businesses, park refinements, and community updates occurring in Great Falls will be all for nothing if our community becomes home to an industrial-scale slaughterhouse.

In short, MFP Slaughterhouse isn't a good fit for Montana, family-owned agriculture, the Great Falls community, or Cascade County. Last spring, the Great Falls City Commission, joined by the Neighborhood Council of Councils and thousands of community members, expressed these concerns to the Governor's Office and requested the highest level of scrutiny of MFP, yet no action has been taken. Our top government leaders' inaction means we must remain vigilant in watching the decision-making of our local county officials who have inexplicably kept this dangerous proposal alive. We can, and must, demand a better future for our families, communities, and way of life.

Protect the Falls is a diverse coalition of Montanans working to safeguard public health, healthy waterways, clean air, and rural quality of life in the larger Great Falls region from the significant threats posed by the proposed industrial-scale multi-species Madison Food Park Slaughterhouse. Learn more at ProtectTheFalls.org