

State lawmaker questions the feasibility of space port project

By Ryan Anderson
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Proponents of Brazoria County's effort to build a spaceport have encountered an obstacle that could scrub their efforts to enter the commercial satellite market.

The obstacle centers around a reluctance by some state lawmakers to provide funding for the project.

"I'm not in favor of using money from the state treasury for the spaceport," said State Rep, Rob Junell, D, San Angelo, chairman of the House Appropriations Committee. "I think it is an idea that will never happen."

Spaceport officials are seeking around \$3 million for an environmental study. Additionally, project backers were asking that \$19 million be placed in a trust for infrastructure.

The funding would need to be in place prior to the construction of a spaceport.

Before funds are awarded, Junell wants to be sure that it would not be money for nothing.

"I think they have a burden to show that we are going to get something for this," Junell said.

Despite the setback in Austin, spaceport officials vow to keep the project alive. One scenario would be to use \$3.1 million from the Texas Aerospace Commission's budget.

"We do need to fight for this \$3.1 million in pursuit funds," said Fred Welch, chairman of the Brazoria County Partnership. "We'll be working with legislators trying to keeps this thing alive."

Another option for securing funds, according to Welch, would be the selling of bonds that would be paid back with future spaceport revenue.

Welch and other supporters believe that were a spaceport to come to Brazoria County, 7,000 new jobs and \$300 million in economic impact would come with it.

Spaceport proponents will bring their case to state officials in Austin during Spaceport Day on Feb. 21.

"We need to go out there and sell them on the program," Welch said.