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Exelon seeks approval of plans for a Victoria nuclear plant

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A unit of Exelon Corp., the nation's largest operator of nuclear plants, submitted an application Wednesday to the federal Nuclear Regulatory Commission, seeking permission to build and to operate a two-reactor plant in Victoria County.

“This is an historic time as Texas moves toward more clean energy sources and keeps pace with growing energy needs,” Thomas O'Neill, Exelon vice president for new plant development, said in a statement.

Exelon's application is the 12th to be submitted to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in the past 14 months.

The company's application comes a year after San Antonio-based CPS Energy and partner NRG Energy filed the first application to build a new nuclear reactor in almost 30 years.

CPS and NRG want to add the reactors to the South Texas Project near Bay City. That plant provides more than one-third of San Antonio's power.

Mike Kotara, CPS executive vice president of energy development, said CPS officials talk with Exelon managers about once a week.

“We're staying apprised of their project because we want to know how viable it is,” he said.

Meanwhile, CPS expects to complete and to file a revised application to expand the South Texas Project with the NRC in October, Kotara said. The revision is needed because CPS shifted from a GE-built reactor to one built by Toshiba of Japan.

Exelon cautioned that its application doesn't mean it has decided to build the plant near Victoria, which is about 96 miles southeast of San Antonio.

The Chicago-based company said the project's continuance would depend on public acceptance, the NRC's approval and its own assurances that the plant will be a financial success. It also will look for the government to decide how to store or to recycle used nuclear fuel.

Exelon said if it decides to go ahead with the project, the plant would be built on about 13 miles south of Victoria on an 11,500-acre site off U.S. 77. If the plant is approved and built, its two reactors could produce at least 3,000 megawatts of electricity — enough to power more than 1.85 million typical Texas homes, Exelon said.

The U.S. Energy Department has estimated that the nation will need 25 percent more electricity by 2030. In Texas, the Electric Reliability Council of Texas, which operates

the state's electrical grid, projects that the state will need 10,000 more megawatts of base-load power by 2014, or about as much as the electricity produced by seven large nuclear reactors or a dozen big coal plants.

Exelon's plant would be a base-load supplier of power.

CPS, mindful of the need for more electricity, is considering sites for yet another power plant. It is looking at five different sites in Matagorda County separate from the South Texas Project.

So far, though, CPS has not purchased or optioned any land in Matagorda County, Kotara said.



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