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COUNTY

Mitchell: Barstow aluminum plant 'unlikely'

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BARSTOW — A project once hailed as a game-changer for Barstow, if not the entire High Desert, appears unlikely, according to the city's top official.

City Manager Curt Mitchell ended weeks of silence on the project proposed by Orange County-based Scuderia Development by reporting during Monday night's City Council meeting that the full scope of the \$1.5 billion aluminum plant project is unlikely to happen. Mitchell blamed the news on high cost of electricity in California.

Mitchell said the city is hopeful that Scuderia may still develop some type of project, though the scope would likely be greatly reduced. He said the city would continue to review it.

When the City Council announced the framework of a development agreement with Scuderia on March 3, it was hailed as potentially the biggest thing to hit Barstow since the railroad.

Scuderia CEO Eric Shen said the plant would employ 2,000 or more highly skilled workers, the majority of whom would make \$40,000 plus per year.

Barstow residents were promised to be in line for many of the jobs, as long as they were sufficiently trained. Barstow Community College Superintendent/President Dr. Debbie DiThomas vowed to do everything possible to bring that training to the college's career technical education program to help residents qualify for the expected jobs.

The 2.95-million-square-foot plant was to be located on 964 acres between Lenwood and Hodge roads, just south of the defunct Sun & Sky Country Club and golf course in Lenwood.

Barstow had secured options to purchase to purchase land surrounding property already owned by Scuderia in Lenwood.

The city expected to spend about \$1.5 million on entitlements for the project, but Mitchell said Monday that Barstow should recoup all of its costs.

Earlier this spring, several city officials had planned to visit China at the invitation of Scuderia, where they were expected to tour aluminum plants and learn more about the project. However, that trip was postponed at the last minute. At the time, city officials blamed the postponement on China's monsoon season.

Since the trip was called off, however, there had been little news from the city about the project until Mitchell's announcement on Monday night.