

Masthead

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## Chatham slows Wake sewer plans

Chatham County officials are holding up plans to build a regional sewer plant for western Wake County.

The Chatham County Board of Commissioners is blocking a request by three Wake towns hoping to build the plant. Cary, Apex and Morrisville - known collectively as the Western Wake Partners - need Chatham's permission to run an eight-mile discharge line from New Hill through Chatham to the Cape Fear River.

The five-person Chatham board has agreed to delay a vote until three newly elected members are sworn in next month. But on Monday, they issued a formal recommendation to incoming commissioners: Don't approve the right of way until the Wake towns agree to a few conditions.

Chatham commissioners want Chatham and Cary to continue to hammer out the contentious joint land-use plan that the two municipalities proposed years ago. Progress has snagged on disagreements between the governments.

Commissioners also want the Western Wake Partners to refrain from using the power of eminent domain as they build the pipeline.

And they want Cary to pass a bill promising not to annex any property from Chatham County without the county's approval.

The sewage plant is critical to growth in western Wake County. The towns are under a state mandate to return treated wastewater to the Cape Fear River Basin, and the Apex Town Council approved a site plan for the new plant Tuesday night.

But under state law, the partners need Chatham County's permission to build the discharge line, a crucial part of the project.

"There is no benefit for Chatham County," from the pipeline, said Sally Kost, chairwoman of Chatham's board.

Cary Mayor Harold Weinbrecht said he doesn't like Chatham's border politics.

"The western Wake wastewater facility is not related to the land-use plan or annexation or anything like that," Weinbrecht said Wednesday. "To hold a facility hostage that will serve over 370,000 businesses and residents is just not a good thing."

But, he said, Cary was willing to work with the Chatham board on solutions to annexation and

land-use disputes.

About 730 Cary residents live on annexed Chatham County property, and a Cary moratorium on annexation in Chatham expired in 2009. The annexed properties pay some taxes in Cary, but they burden Chatham County schools and other infrastructure, said Chatham Commissioner George Lucier.

Lucier said his board's requests were relevant, especially in the face of the growth the wastewater plant could support.

"This New Hill plant, obviously, will provide extra capacity for Cary or Apex to annex into Chatham County," he said Wednesday. "We don't want to be totally vulnerable to other jurisdictions."

If the Chatham recommendation becomes reality, Weinbrecht said, the Western Wake Partners would turn to other options, which he said he was "probably not at liberty to discuss."

"We don't want to go there," he said. "We want to work with Chatham County to come up with something." But at the moment, he said, Cary and the partners had no intention of going forward with any of Chatham's recommendations.

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