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## Chatham vote clears way for pipeline

PITTSBORO Chatham County commissioners voted 3-2 Monday to allow Cary, Apex and Morrisville to secure an eight-mile wastewater pipeline easement through Chatham County to the Cape Fear River.

Chatham's approval removes the last major hurdle for construction of a \$327 million regional sewage plant, and opens the door for growth in western Wake County that had stalled in great part due to lack of wastewater treatment capacity.

The agreement also enables those three towns, the Western Wake Partners, to comply with a state environmental mandate to return their water to the same basin they drew from: the Cape Fear.

Last night's approval follows the partners' settlement in late January with residents from the unincorporated Wake town of New Hill, where the sewage plant is scheduled to be built, beginning as early as this fall.

Stephen Brown, director of Cary's public works and utilities, says all that remains is final authorization to construct the plant from the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

"We're pleased with the outcome of tonight's vote," Apex Town Manager Bruce Radford said. "This gives us the ability to proceed."

Border politics and neighborhood protests slowed plans for the plant for years.

To acquire the easement, the partners, led by the town of Cary, will lease private land from 12 Chatham landowners along the pipeline route. Barring a settlement with landowners, the partners can seize the land through eminent domain.

Three Chatham commissioners, newly elected in November, voted in support of the Western Wake Partners' request. They characterized their support as a necessary compromise and the wastewater project as inevitable.

"The pipeline's going to happen," Commissioner Walter Petty said. "We can't stop it."

Moments before the vote, Chairman Brian Bock said, "At this point, it's the best deal we can get, and the best deal for Chatham County."

#### What Chatham gets

Chatham commissioners reached the following concessions with the Western Wake Partners:

The partners will support state legislation - and local agreements - to prevent involuntary annexation into Chatham County by Cary and Apex.

To mitigate the negative effects of the pipeline, the partners will pay a lump sum of \$500,000 in cash to help renovate a youth center in Moncure, near the proposed pipeline.

The partners will allow Chatham County businesses and residences to tap into the pipeline for possible future use, at no cost to Chatham County.

Commissioners Sally Kost and Mike Cross, who had asked the new commissioners in November not to approve the easements, voted against the pipeline.

More than half of the land the pipeline will cross is owned by Progress Energy. The pipe will also cross Chatham tracts owned by 14 private landowners.

The pipeline will transport a maximum of 38 million gallons of water per day, enough capacity to serve the needs of the growing Wake towns for at least two decades.

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