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## **Controversial sewage plant receives green light**

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by Shawn Daley

08.03.10 - 10:13 am

After years of waiting, the Western Wake Partners finally received the green light to build a controversial regional sewage plant in the middle of New Hill.

While plans for such a facility have been considered by state and local governments for more than eight years, the actual fight by New Hill to keep the sewage plant out of their community has lasted 62 months.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced its final decision last week by ruling that the towns of Cary, Apex, Holly Springs and Morrisville could build in New Hill despite the objections of its residents.

Apex Mayor Keith Weatherly praised the decision as an important victory in the town's long-term economic development.

"We certainly believe the Corps made the correct decision," said Weatherly. "Obviously, we need this additional sewage capacity to have future economic development in Apex. People will, hopefully, now have confidence to invest in our town once the economy turns around. We look forward to moving ahead (with the project) for the good of Apex."

The news of the decision was met with a bit less enthusiasm in New Hill.

"We're disappointed but it wasn't unexpected," said New Hill Community Association President Paul Barth. "That's why we haven't been sitting around doing nothing. We've been planning for this eventuality."

Not wanting to tip his hand with any specifics, Barth said the fight against the sewage plant is still not over.

"There are still a couple of things we are looking into," said Barth. "Our lawyer is reviewing different angles for a lawsuit. That is certainly still an option."

New Hill residents had argued that the sewage plant would have a negative effect on their community, especially on the many African-

American residents who live near the chosen site.

“There are better places with less human impact to put this plant. We ask the Western Wake Partners to reconsider dumping on poor communities of color and find a better solution,” said Reverend James Clanton, pastor of the First Baptist Church New Hill, in a written statement.

But U.S. Army Corps District Commander Col. Jefferson Byscavage said the Western Wake Partners had taken enough steps in their planning to mitigate the worst adverse effects. He wrote that a 200-foot buffer around a state-of-the-art facility equipped with the latest technology would mitigate any problems with noise, light, odor or spills.

“When all elements of the project are considered, no significant and adverse impacts are likely to fall on the affected (environmental justice) population,” wrote Byscavage in an 85-page report. “On balance, the total public interest would be best served by the issuance of a Department of the Army permit (for the chosen site).

“I find that the proposed project is not contrary to the public interest, and that there are no practicable alternatives that meet the Project Partners’ purpose and need that have less environmental ... impacts.”

Weatherly said he was pleased the Corps had agreed with the Western Wake Partners about the chosen site.

“I can’t say we would do anything different,” said Weatherly. “Now, I was surprised by the level of opposition in New Hill. But this is going to be a state-of-the-art facility that should mitigate their concerns.”

Barth said the community was left to fend for itself by the Wake County Commissioners.

“We never got any support from them and they are our only representatives,” said Barth. “They totally abandoned us. We supplied them with facts and figures years ago.”

As for the upcoming months, Barth vows his group will fight on.

“They know the site they chose was wrong,” said Barth. “The numbers don’t lie. They chose a site that has the greatest amount of impact (on residents). They know it in their hearts but they will never admit it.

“We don’t plan on stopping until the concrete is poured. We are going to delay it as long as we can and hurt them where it counts the most – their wallets. The project is already behind schedule and the cost has risen considerably. We’ve already hurt them and we’re happy about that.”

Apex Public Works and Utilities Director Tim Donnelly said the project is “a little over two years” behind schedule. He added that construction could begin by the end of the year and the plant could open as early as late 2013.

“But that is if everything goes absolutely perfect,” said Donnelly. “We still have a lot of work to get done.”

Apex’s share in the \$350,000,000 plant is currently \$85,000,000 but that number could rise for a variety of reasons. Some of those expenses have already been paid for by the towns.