

## Hard looks in New Hill

There continues to be something about the move by four western Wake County towns to build a new sewage treatment plant in the rural community of New Hill that smells like, you guessed it, a sewage treatment plant.

Take, for example, what happened when Apex commissioner Mike Jones, trying to respond to complaints of New Hill residents that their interests are being ignored, came up with a possible alternate site not far from the one the towns have chosen.

As reported by The N&O, the alternative was evaluated. But Mayor Ernie McAlister of Cary said the notion of relocating the project never was given any "serious consideration." If not, why not?

The concept of the towns combining forces to build the new facility no doubt makes sense. With all the growth in the area, the need for more treatment capacity is virtually a given. That's especially true since the state wants treated sewage to be released into the Cape Fear River basin, from which the towns draw water, instead of the basin of the Neuse. But the towns have been heavy-handed in their selection of the site in New Hill. The community along Old U.S. 1 is sparsely populated, but if the plant is built on a 212-acre farm now targeted for condemnation, it will be within 1,000 feet of 23 houses. The 197-acre location proposed by Jones would be that close to only one house.

The Jones option supposedly would raise the project's cost from \$516 to \$519 million. Yet that seems like a piddling increase under the circumstances. Another objection is said to be that it would more difficult to expand the plant. Maybe so, but couldn't the alternative at least been given a public hearing, with New Hill residents able to monitor the discussion? They weren't.

All along, questions have been raised about how the list of possible alternative sites was winnowed down. These aren't idle concerns. If the towns that intend to build this plant -- at considerable annoyance to residents who can't even vote in town elections -- want to be seen as acting in the public interest and in good faith, they will refrain once and for all from acting as if they're determined to shove the plant down those residents' throats.

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