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New Hill hookups come with a hitch

Neighboring towns will pay for sewer and water if residents agree to sewage treatment plant

TOBY COLEMAN, Staff Writer

The suburbs want to give something free to country folk, and for once no annexation is required.

Still, you can forgive the residents of New Hill for looking a bit askance at the offer by Apex, Cary and Morrisville to give New Hill \$3 million in water and sewer hookups. In exchange, the towns want the residents of the southern Wake community to accept a sewage treatment plant in their neighborhood.

That is a tough deal to take, Bobby Horton said, even with assurances that the plant won't stink. Sure, the connections would allow Horton to subdivide his 10 acres close to the proposed site, but who would want to buy the lots if they stink?

"I know what a sewage plant smells like, and I know a windy day," said Horton, 66, a retired truck driver.

Apex, Cary and Morrisville leaders made the offer after consultants hired to help them win state approval for their New Hill sewage plant surveyed residents of the 38 homes within a half-mile of the proposed facility.

Town leaders recently became willing to spend millions of their taxpayers' money to appease the plant's neighbors, of whom more than 80 percent are black, according to town documents. They hope the deal will erase concerns about environmental racism from state regulators' minds.

"It's the right thing to do," said Kim Fisher, Cary's public works director. "And we always try to do the right thing."

Still, Fisher acknowledges that the towns might not be making the offer if the plant's neighbors were mostly affluent white people. If that was the case, "we wouldn't have an environmental justice issue."

Apex, Cary and Morrisville leaders hope the

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deal will help kick their \$290 million sewage treatment plans back into gear. The project is already behind schedule, and further delays could hinder Apex's ability to expand. Last month, representatives from the three towns pledged more than \$2.3 million for the effort.

What remains uncertain, though, is who would pay the rest of the estimated \$3 million tab.

Apex, Cary and Morrisville want Holly Springs taxpayers to contribute nearly \$700,000, but Holly Springs Mayor Dick Sears is not on board. The reason: Holly Springs does not plan to send sewage to New Hill. It's just helping the towns with the project so the town can use the pipe that will take treated wastewater from the proposed plant to the Cape Fear River.

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