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## New Hill not alone in fight against injustice

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by Shawn Daley

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Having been engaged in a five-year struggle to keep a sewage plant out of the heart of their community, the folks in New Hill have felt a bit lonely at times.

Over the weekend they saw firsthand that they are far from alone in the fight against perceived injustice. An environmental justice

summit was held Saturday morning at New Hill First Baptist Church. The New Hill Community Association hosted the event in conjunction with the Southern Coalition for Social Justice and the NC Environmental Justice Network.

More than 75 people attended the summit, which was held as a way for different groups to learn about each other's struggles.

"This was held to educate people who have expressed an interest in what we are doing," said Paul Barth, president of the NHCA. "We also had speakers from other groups talk about their experiences and what can be done and what should be done.

"We aren't completely alone in this fight. We have picked up some allies along the way. But this really gave us a chance to get together with people who are fighting similar battles against landfills, sewage plants and hog waste ponds. It's good to speak with people who are dealing with similar issues."

The towns of Apex, Cary, Morrisville and Holly Springs are planning to build a regional wastewater treatment plant near two churches and numerous homes in New Hill.

The self-dubbed Western Wake Partners planned to have the sewage plant completed in 2011. As a result of the strong fight put up by New Hill residents the controversial project has already fallen three years behind schedule.

"They are three years behind schedule and they will probably end up four years behind," said Barth. "I don't see them opening the plant before 2015. We are going to delay them as long as we can because we feel what they are doing is wrong."

Summit organizers invited various local elected officials to the event but only Apex Councilman Bill Jensen and Morrisville Mayor Jackie

Holcombe attended.

“Bill Jensen has always spoken strongly on our behalf and we are grateful,” said Barth.

Barth said he was disappointed that none of the Wake County Commissioners even respond to the invitation.

“We invited Mayor Keith Weatherly in Apex and Mayor Dick Sears in Holly Springs,” said Barth. “They contacted us and said they weren’t going to attend and that is fine.

“But we were surprised none of the county commissioners bothered to even respond to us. They are supposed to be our elected representatives and they never acknowledged us.”

With the fight against the Western Wake Partners drawing to an inevitable close – a final decision on the proposed site by the Army Corps of Engineers is expected some time this spring – Barth said his group remains optimistic.

“If I didn’t have hope I couldn’t keep going on with everything,” said Barth. “But we know it is coming to an end. It has gone through all the processes and once that final decision is made there isn’t much more we can do. But legal options are still certainly available to us.”

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