

Masthead



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New Hill residents assail sewage plant

Opponents say it should be built elsewhere

BY TED RICHARDSON - Staff Writer

They came from Cary, Morrisville, Apex and Chapel Hill.

They packed the seats of the 100-year-old First Baptist Church.

They spoke their minds. And they listened to a panel of pastors, scholars, and environmental activists.

It was all part of a Saturday summit aimed at bolstering opposition to a \$300 million sewage treatment plant in New Hill, an unincorporated section of southwestern Wake County.

"We had no vote, we'll get no benefit," said Paul Barth, president of New Hill Community Association, an organization that formed in 2005 to oppose the project.

The wastewater plant, proposed by four western Wake towns, would be built adjacent to homes and churches at the heart of this rural crossroads.

Construction could begin this year. But before it does, New Hill residents wanted the towns to hear their plea: Consider building elsewhere.

"Why is there such a big rush?" Barth said before the rally. "Why can't we sit down and really consider the alternative sites?"

Cary, Apex, Morrisville and Holly Springs formed the Western Wake Partnership to pursue construction of the wastewater treatment plant to meet the needs of their fast-growing populations.

Cary, Apex and Morrisville would send waste to the plant, and treated wastewater would then be sent to the Cape Fear River.

Holly Springs plans to use the facility's pipe to send its own treated waste to the river.

Applications for building permits for the wastewater plant could be submitted as early as May, assuming the site meets environmental standards set by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The partnership says it picked the New Hill area because it is the most logical place for treating the sewage.

Opponents say New Hill may have been targeted because of its demographics.

"There's a trend of these types of facilities being put into low-income communities, communities of color that lack political power," said Elena Everett, spokeswoman for Southern Coalition for Social Justice, which helped organize the summit.

Henry Wicker, a special projects manager for the Corps of Engineers, said the proposed plant would have little negative repercussions for surrounding wetlands. The corps may make a final recommendation in May.

Summit organizers are hoping that continued community pressure, which has helped delay the project by several years, will persuade regulators to strike down the New Hill location.

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