

## New Hill surrenders fight

02.04.11 - 05:56 pm



Nearly six years ago, the New Hill residents rallied together to fight the Western Wake Partners' plan to build a sewage plant in the heart of their community. That battle came to end last week with the white flag of surrender.

Fortunately for New Hill residents, the surrender was not unconditional.

As part of an agreement to drop a lawsuit against construction of the Western Wake Regional Wastewater facility, the Partners will build two school bus shelters and contribute \$500,000 toward a community center.

The Partners will also provide water and sewer infrastructure to the center if it's built close to the sewage plant. They had already agreed to provide those services to residents living in close proximity to the plant.

"We did well for ourselves, all things considered," said New Hill Community Association President Paul Barth. "With the permits already being approved for the sewage facility we felt it was time to see how we could benefit the community. It was time to move on."

It was May of 2005 that the NHCA formed with the goal of keeping the regional sewage plant out of the middle of the New Hill community. Residents proudly called their fight a David versus Goliath struggle. New Hill, however, needed a much bigger slingshot to bring down the concerted efforts of Cary, Apex and Morrisville – the self-dubbed Western Wake Partners – to build their \$327 million plant. The facility allows the towns to meet a state mandate to return treated wastewater to the Cape Fear River basin. It also gives the towns much needed sewage capacity, which will most certainly lead to more growth in the area.

“This project is necessary due to the state’s interbasin transfer rules and to provide additional treatment capacity for new or expanding businesses in RTP South, Apex, Cary and Morrisville,” said Apex Mayor Keith Weatherly in a written statement. “Continued economic vitality is necessary to provide jobs for families in our region. Our plant will also ensure our neighbors on the Cape Fear River have adequate water to meet their demands.”

The Southern Coalition for Justice filed a petition with the NC Office of Administrative Hearings on Sept. 9, 2010. The suit challenged a permit issued by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources. After the Partners joined in the legal fray in support of DENR the case was heard by a mediator on Dec. 9 and 29. All parties signed the agreement last week.

Barth and all other NHCA officers “will no longer participate in interviews, marches, or other activities that are negative toward the project” as part of the agreement. NHCA officers are also asking that residents “remove all anti-project signage and displays from their yards.”

“The biggest thing that came out of all of this is that the community came together like it never had before,” said Barth. “We didn’t know each other like we do now and we’re better for that. “We also didn’t come away empty handed. I think we made the best of the situation.” The plant is scheduled to open in early 2013, more than two years behind schedule.

“The New Hill Community Association has been a strong advocate for the interests of their community,” said Weatherly. “We are pleased that our negotiations have reached a successful conclusion and that the New Hill Community Center will serve New Hill residents well for many years.

“Because of this agreement, we can now be assured that one of the most important projects of its kind in the state is able to proceed in an efficient and economical manner.”