

Published: Apr 21, 2009 04:09 PM
Modified: Apr 21, 2009 04:09 PM

Objections continue to proposed sewage plant in New Hill

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Half of Apex Town Hall was a sea of red shirts April 14 at the public hearing on Western Wake Regional Wastewater Management Facilities, a proposed sewage plant slated for New Hill.

The people in red, representing a New Hill residential association, had a common message: Build it somewhere else.

"Who wants to live near a stinking sewage plant?" asked resident Vickie Gardner.

"I'm embarrassed that our sewage is going to be piped through beautiful countryside to the New Hill community," said Carl Thor, a Cary resident, one of the 46 speakers who weighed in that night.

As proposed, the \$329 million plant will sit between Shearon Harris Road and New Hill Holleman Road. Called "site 14," it will service the surging sewage needs in Cary, Apex, Holly Springs and Morrisville, towns who have partnered on the project, with Cary funding over half of the cost.

The meeting stretched to three hours, with detailed presentations on the plan's engineering report, environmental impact statement and certification requirements.

Mayors Keith Weatherly (Apex), Dick Sears (Holly Springs), Harold Weinbrecht (Cary) and a representative for Jan Faulkner (Morrisville) spoke in favor of using New Hill.

"As a mayor personally committed to environmental protection, I am proud to be speaking in favor of this facility," Weinbrecht said. He left the hearing immediately after his comments, something that didn't go unnoticed.

"The people who have been very hard to work with has been Apex and Cary. And who's missing in this room?" asked New Hill resident Bob Kelly.

Weinbrecht responded in an e-mail that he had to meet guests from France and left Cary Town Manager Ben Shivar, Public Information Officer Susan Moran and several utility staff members to brief him on what he'd missed.

The Cary Mayor's statement at the hearing left no doubt that he supports New Hill as the preferred site for the plant.

"Exhaustive analysis of draft EIS proves without a doubt that [the] project should move forward," he said. "Move forward without delay and move forward on Partners' proposed

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site.”

Residents’ objections included lowered property values, stench, noise and light pollution. They fear leaks in the pipeline, possibly contaminating their well water. They questioned accountability to New Hill, whose people aren’t represented by the towns spearheading the project.

Resident Anne King said that there are 231 people, two churches and historical cemeteries within a half mile of site 14.

“Put the site where there are fewer people,” said John Moore.

Nobody disputed the need for a new facility, which will accommodate ballooning populations and fulfill previous interbasin transfer requirements issued by the state to return water to the Cape Fear River by 2011. The plans also address Holly Springs’ commitment to relocate its waste discharge from Utley Creek.

Chris Brook, an attorney representing New Hill, questioned how the towns intend to make that deadline with a project slated for completion in 2013.

Residents said there are other sites near U.S. 1 that will accomplish these goals without impacting their community. Many urged “site 21/23,” located west of New Hill Holleman Road — land owned by Progress Energy. But town documents favor the New Hill site based on discharge lake logistics, environmental protection and water quality.

New Hill residents countered that they think the decision had more to do with politics. Some cited racism.

“There is an 83 percent minority population within a half mile radius of site 14,” said Edna Horton.

Other comments were more pointed.

“When I get up in the morning and look in the mirror, I know why they chose it,” said Louis Powell, a black resident. “We don’t have the political clout to fight you. We don’t have the money.”

Documents predict a 15 to 35 percent utility bill increase for the towns serviced by the new plant.

See more on the project at westernwakepartners.com. Another public hearing is scheduled for this summer.

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