

Masthead

Published Sat, Jan 08, 2011 02:00 AM

Modified Sat, Jan 08, 2011 12:41 AM

Permit advances New Hill water plant

State officials brought a long-disputed regional wastewater treatment plant one step closer to reality Friday.

The state Division of Water Quality issued a permit that allows three western Wake County towns to send 18 million gallons of treated wastewater to the Cape Fear River through a plant the towns have jointly planned in the community of New Hill.

"It's one of the most important permits that we needed to acquire," said Stephen Brown, Cary's director of public works and utilities. "It is a major step."

The project, which needs a construction permit from the state, would serve Cary, Apex and Morrisville - collectively known as the Western Wake Partners. The trio are planning the \$327 million project in part to comply with a state environmental mandate to return treated wastewater to the Cape Fear River basin, where they draw their drinking water.

The plant also would allow the towns to continue to grow by providing an outlet for sewage created by new residents and businesses.

In granting the permit, the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources has approved the towns' plans to send water to the river and fulfill the state's mandate.

The permit, which allows the town to eventually discharge as much as 30 million gallons of treated wastewater a day into the Cape Fear, takes into account the impact on the river's water quality.

The Army Corps of Engineers also blessed a positive environmental assessment of the project last summer.

Now the most significant state approval needed for the project is DENR's authorization to build the plant. The state will review the project's permits and designs before it decides whether the plant should be built.

Some people who live near the proposed plant have continued their legal battle against it. The issuance of the discharge permit "was something that we were expecting to happen," said Paul Barth, president of the New Hill Community Association. "We're still going to pursue doing whatever we can do."

Many of the New Hill association's 300-plus members are fighting what they see as an unwanted incursion into their rural life, Barth said. The Southern Coalition for Social Justice has helped them raise legal challenges to the project.

A hearing on their challenge of a water-quality permit for the plant is scheduled for Jan. 24.

Mayor Harold Weinbrecht of Cary said planners are working toward mediation with New Hill residents.

Plant proponents also must reach an accord with the Chatham County Board of Commissioners, which must approve an eight-mile discharge pipe through the county to the Cape Fear River.

Chatham County has scheduled a hearing about the pipeline for Feb. 7 in Moncure, close to the proposed path of the pipe.

andy.kenney@nando.com or 919-460-2608