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**Plant site irks citizens**

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## Article Text:

**NEW HILL** -- Perhaps no one understands the danger of being an unincorporated village inside a county bursting with development better than the residents of **New Hill**.

They had the lesson driven home to them last month when the Western Wake Partnership announced it had chosen a 220-acre plot in **New Hill** as the site of a **new** regional sewage treatment plant.

It is **New Hill's** bad fortune to be both undisturbed and conveniently located. It lies in the sparsely populated southwestern corner of the county and also happens to be located near the four growing municipalities that make up the Western Wake Partnership: Cary, Apex, Morrisville and Holly Springs.

The plant, which is expected to open by late 2010, will initially treat 18 million gallons of wastewater a day from the four towns and carry it to the Cape Fear River basin. It is part of a \$193 million project, funded by the towns, that also includes two **new** pumping stations and connecting pipelines.

But the chosen location has shocked and angered **New Hill** residents, who complain that they had no say in a decision to build a plant that they probably won't be able to use.

"Would you want a cesspool in your back yard?" asked Robert Hopewell, 57, who lives on five acres off Barker Road. "We don't have nothing to do with Apex or Cary."

Like most residents, Hopewell found out about the proposed plant after a bicyclist stuffed a flier in his mailbox informing him of a meeting organized by concerned citizens. At that meeting, held Tuesday, hundreds of local

residents packed the **New Hill** Baptist Church to express their dismay to county officials.

"We all understand that a facility like this is needed, but not in the middle of **New Hill**," said Randel Sink, 58, who lives on 13 acres off **New Hill** Olive Chapel Road.

Although **New Hill** residents seem to have an uphill battle to block the plant, their anger has caused Cary, the lead partner in the project, to take a step back.

The Cary Town Council, the lead agency in the partnership, has delayed voting on launching condemnation proceedings on the land until June 23. The council decided not to vote until after a June 14 public meeting at which Cary officials and **New Hill** residents will discuss the site selection process.

Cary Council member Mike Joyce said the informational meeting should have been the first step in the process.

"There's a fear that Cary's going to come out looking like the aggressor when it's a regional project," he said.

Over the past two years, consultants for the Western Wake Partnership have reviewed 29 potential sites for the facility. Kim Fisher, Cary's director of public works and utilities, said the **New Hill** site was chosen earlier this year from a final group of three.

Fisher said the partnership is sensitive to the rural lifestyle that **New Hill** residents enjoy and that Cary and its partners have no intention of disrupting that.

"We don't want them to know that we're even there," he said.

A visit to **New Hill** quickly confirms that the area has largely been exempt from the explosive growth happening elsewhere in Wake County. The community's main drag along Old U.S. 1 is dotted with abandoned buildings, including its longtime meeting spot, Farmer's Supply Store, which closed in 2002.

While a sign at the corner of Old U.S. 1 and **New Hill** Holleman Road facetiously lists **New Hill**'s population as two, the local post office delivers to about 850 residences.

Most **New Hill** residents live on large plots of land and have private wells and sewer systems; this has only increased local anger about having a wastewater plant next door. Few residents believe they will be able to tie into the system once it's in place.

"We have no prospects of using this thing," said Wayne Womble, whose land sits across **New Hill** Holleman Road from the proposed site.

Womble, who runs a business servicing Corvette sports cars along Old U.S. 1, said he has been battling the county to get approval to put another building on his property to store his cars.

Hopewell expressed similar frustrations with the number of restrictions placed on development in the area, saying the county told him he must raze his existing home before building a **new** one on his property.

"The problem we have is that there has been a conscious effort by the county against doing anything in this area," Womble said.

The lack of growth, he said, makes the area around **New Hill** attractive when municipalities or the county seek to locate undesirable projects.

**New Hill** residents also bristle at the mention of the Western Wake Partnership, since they were not a part of the group's decision-making process.

"Who is the partner here?" Womble asked. "We had no representation."

Phil Jeffreys, a Wake County commissioner who lives in Raleigh and represents the **New Hill** area, said he learned of the **New Hill** site the same time local residents did.

"I have probably been as ill-informed about this as I have about anything," he said. "We knew what was going on; we just did not know any of the particulars."

Meanwhile, with no elected leaders and no formal place at the table, **New Hill** residents such as Randel Sink face an uphill battle.

"We have no voice," Sink said. "I don't know. We'll organize and fight the best we can."

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#### WHY PLANT IS NEEDED

The treatment plant proposed for the **New Hill** area is needed for two reasons, according to local officials.

In 2001, the N.C. Environmental Management Commission allowed Cary, Apex, Morrisville and Wake County to increase the amount of water they take out of the Haw River basin from 16 million gallons per day to 24 million gallons per day, but said they couldn't increase the amount of treated wastewater they were pumping into another watershed: the Neuse River basin. That meant they would have to build a treatment plant to discharge treated wastewater into the Haw or Cape Fear basins (the Haw flows into the Cape Fear) after 2010.

The towns also want additional sewage treatment capacity to meet expected growth. Cary, for example, is projecting an annual growth rate of 3 percent. Officials from Apex, Holly Springs and Morrisville say the plant is vital to allow their communities to keep growing.

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