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Potential Wake wastewater plant faces new challenges

CARY -- The Southern Coalition for Social Justice today filed a petition that challenges the placement of a regional wastewater treatment plant in New Hill, an unincorporated community in western Wake County.

The petition, filed at the state Office of Administrative Hearings on behalf the New Hill Community Association, charges that the N.C. Department of Environment and Natural Resources issued a water quality certificate to the Western Wake Partners based on insufficient information on potential environmental impacts on the community.

The Western Wake Partners is a consortium of four western Wake towns — Cary, Apex, Morrisville and Holly Springs — that are planning the \$327 million plant to meet a state mandate that required three of the towns to return treated wastewater to the Cape Fear River Basin. The project also would help the towns deal with growth for the next 20 years.

The Southern Coalition is asking state court administrators for a hearing to contest DENR's certification of the plant in an effort to block construction.

"We have been willing to host the Partners' sewage treatment plant so long as it was not in the middle of our community, but the Partners won't meet us halfway," the Rev. James E. Clanton, pastor of First Baptist Church in New Hill and a leader in the community association, said in a statement. "It is unfortunate we have to resort to litigation to have our voices heard."

Mary Penny Thompson, general counsel for DENR, did not immediately return a message seeking comment.

The New Hill site received final environmental approval from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers last month. But the Corps' blessing, followed by the state environmental permit, stoked more opposition in the New Hill community.

In its petition, the coalition and community association claim that building the regional plant in New Hill would significantly impact low-income and African-American residents. The petition claims that the treatment facility also would have negative environmental impacts, including exposing residents to sewage sludge, noxious odors, increased noise and light pollution.

Mayor Keith Weatherly of Apex, chairman of the Western Wake Partners Policy Advisory Committee, on Thursday said New Hill residents have had ample opportunity to voice their concerns. He praised the Army Corps for its findings.

"The Corps had a three-year exhaustive study on all the issues that were relevant," he said. "The

concerns of the good people of New Hill were taken into account during the public comment sessions, and I think the Corps made the right decision."

The mayor referred additional questions about the lawsuit to the town's attorneys.

ted.richardson@nando.com or 919-460-2608