

Masthead

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## Report propels plans for plant

The long, controversial process of building a \$300 million sewage-treatment plant in western Wake County hit a milestone Friday with the release of an environmental report from the Army Corps of Engineers.

The report, called an environmental impact statement, includes technical data on several possible sites, along with municipal and community input on the proposed plant, which is planned in the New Hill community. Cary, Apex, Morrisville and Holly Springs formed a partnership that is planning to build the plant.

The environmental report does not recommend a particular site. Instead, it provides information that state and federal agencies can use in evaluating future applications for plant permits. It is a required step in moving forward with the project, said Steve Brown, Cary's public works and utilities director.

Residents of New Hill, an unincorporated community near the Shearon Harris nuclear plant, have long opposed the wastewater plant. The partnership's preferred site is near the crossroad community's historic homes and churches. Residents worry about the sights and smells that a wastewater-treatment plant brings.

"They're dropping it right in the middle of our community," said Paul Barth, president of the New Hill Community Association. He thinks the project's organizers purposely picked New Hill because it is unincorporated and home to a number of low-income, African-American families - people who might not have the means or the organization to resist the plant.

Partnership members have maintained they picked the New Hill area because it is the most logical and efficient place for treating the sewage. The treated wastewater would be released into the Cape Fear River. Cary, Apex and Morrisville will send waste to the plant; Holly Springs plans to use the facility's pipe to send its own treated wastewater to the river.

If approved, the plant could begin operation in 2013. The population growth in western Wake County, along with state regulatory demands, requires that a new plant be constructed, Brown said.

Barth said New Hill residents have come to accept that a plant will be built in their community. But he hopes that community pressure, which has already helped delay the project, will persuade regulators to not approve the partnership's preferred spot.

There are other sites, Barth said, that would not have such a dramatic impact on the community.

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