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Sewage plant behind schedule

By [Shawn Daley](#) Editor

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Although the regional sewage plant targeted for New Hill has fallen behind schedule by eight months, Apex Public Works and Utilities Director Tim Donnelly is optimistic of meeting the 2011 deadline.

Donnelly gave an update on the facility during the annual town council retreat held Friday at town hall.

In an attempt to appease the state agencies and vocal opponents of the facility, the Western Wake Partners of Apex, Cary, Holly Springs and Morrisville are considering allowing residents near the proposed plant to hook up to the system.

Those New Hill residents would not have to be annexed by Apex in order to use the facility and all impact fees would be waived until the landowners' property undergoes redevelopment.

That deal would help alleviate concerns the NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources had with the Environmental Justice portion of the Partners' environmental impact statement.

"The continuing comment we heard is that we are not providing easy access to sewer and water," said Donnelly. "So we have come up with a small collection system right around the plant."

The cost of such a collection system is estimated at about \$3 million.

Councilman Bill Sutton urged Donnelly to make the system as simple as possible in order to pacify the New Hill residents who oppose the facility being built in the middle of their community.

"Just make it a clean deal and get over it," said Sutton. "Grandfather them in who already live there. This is a good solution to the Environmental Justice problem. You need to get those people off your back and get the permit (to build the facility)."

The coordinated opposition to the plant by New Hill residents played a role in the state delaying its acceptance of the environmental impact statement.

Donnelly dismissed the opposition as a "not-in-my-backyard syndrome."

"We have gone above and beyond," said Donnelly. "You can never get over that a sewage plant is a not-in-my-backyard thing. Wherever we site it we would have that problem."

Donnelly said the chosen site was the "most cost effective for our taxpayers, which is who we work for."

Donnelly said a further delay of the project would have serious consequences on the town's ability to grow.

Apex is currently paying Raleigh for one million gallons of extra sewage capacity and more delays could lead to the contract expiring before the regional facility is built.

The town is already close to exhausting that extra capacity from Raleigh and Apex has development interests that would equal about two million gallons of capacity.

The cost of construction is also higher than anticipated and the costs will only increase as time goes on. Apex planned to spend about \$70 million on its portion of the plant but that cost is now at \$72 million.

The facility also needs to be built before the town's Inter-basin Transfer Certificate expires, which could result in violations of state requirements.

Donnelly said some float time was added to the construction schedule but that extra time has already been used up.

"We didn't think we'd use all the float we had," said Donnelly. "We are a little behind the eight-ball. The delay has made me nervous. But I'm pretty darn optimistic that we can still catch up."