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Time is now for water plan

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By **Randy Voller**

The situation with wastewater is complicated and should rise above bumper stickers. It is expensive to treat waste water and will require regional cooperation. Typical estimates for a modern plant are \$8 to \$20 a gallon. It was wise to engage the Western Wake partners, as county commissioners Patrick Barnes, George Lucier and others have, and we have preliminarily forced a concession. But at what cost?

In the beginning, a group of towns from Western Wake led by Cary were driving for 38 million gallons of discharge into the Cape Fear River. The move was being driven by government regulations and the large capacity was being driven by a desire to annex into Chatham County and serve the land on their western frontier. Cary planners estimated 400,000 people would eventually inhabit the area contiguous to Chatham County and within the 10 mile "horn" district of Shearon Harris.

No plans have been made for transportation, impact on Jordan Lake, how this expansion would encourage one and perhaps two more reactors at Shearon Harris and contentious water-rights issues on Jordan Lake. Furthermore, the entire New Hill community will most likely be eliminated.

Once Chatham entered the picture, we asked for half of the capacity and no further annexations. Instead, the Cary group whips up a quick study and suddenly the assembling capacity of the Cape Fear River is 57 million gallons, and through scientific wizardry we get our 19 million gallons.

So now we have the possibility of real Atlanta-style sprawl, with perhaps 600,000 to 700,000 people eventually living in and around Jordan Lake, the Cape Fear and Harris Lake. Where is the plan?

I believe we should be pushing harder for a regional Chatham water and sewer authority (CHWASA). Siler City should have the alternative of pumping reuse water down US 64 for distribution to farmers, businesses and homeowners. This should tie directly into a Pittsboro "purple pipe" program used for much of the same. We should be pushing for the state to allow a more liberal use of tertiary treated wastewater. We could be growing canola and switch grass on our land, crushing it in Siler City or Pittsboro and selling the meal off to farmers and the virgin oil to biofuels. This keeps money in our area and wastewater out of the Rocky River and Cape Fear – a closed loop.

We need to be visionaries. Our water needs to be cleaned up and our wastewater needs to be planned. Because of these aforementioned plans, Cary is now emboldened to push for a lot more water from Jordan Lake for the "Western Wake Partners." (Please see the recent resolution passed by the Town of Cary.) We should applaud initiative, but realize it comes with a cost.

The "butterfly effect" is in full force and there will be a lot more to worry about than septic tanks in the next 20 years. Freedom of choice. It is a gift and a burden. Choose wisely.

Randy Voller is mayor of Pittsboro. This essay appears courtesy of Chatham County Line.

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