

New Hill residents request concessions

BY TED RICHARDSON, STAFF WRITER

For five years, residents of New Hill have fought plans for a wastewater treatment plant in their community.

But the \$327 million project appears closer to reality, and could begin construction as early as this year. So a group of residents is trying to at least cushion what they think will be negative impact on local residents. "We're trying to make a bad thing less bad," said Paul Barth, president of the New Hill Community Association.

So last month, Barth's group presented a mitigation plan to the Western Wake Partners, a coalition of towns spearheading the project.

Through the plan, the group is asking the towns to extend sewer and water service to a wider group of New Hill residents - and pay for it in full.

The group also wants a bigger buffer around the actual plant - and guarantees that the towns won't expand the plant beyond what is

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already proposed.

The mitigation plan also calls for resident recourse if the plant does not operate as advertised.

"If the Western Wake Partners are going to move ahead on this, it seemed wise for us to try to improve this plan," said Chris Brook, attorney for the New Hill Community Association, which has been fighting approval of the plant since 2005.

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Cary, along with Apex, Morrisville and Holly Springs, formed the Western Wake Partners to build the wastewater treatment plant to meet the needs of their fast-growing population.

In 2006, the partners issued an environmental impact statement determining the unincorporated town of New Hill was the best location for the plant.

The town of Cary, as the lead agent in the Western Wake Partners, has already used its power of eminent domain to purchase a 237-acre parcel in New Hill where the 62-acre plant is proposed to be built. The project also includes a network of pump stations and sewer lines, with an estimated completion date of 2013. The cost will be divided among the participating towns.

According to the New Hill Community Association, the site would impact 230 residents.

Steve Brown, Cary's public works director, says an environmental impact statement from the Army Corps of Engineers already includes discussion of appropriate mitigation.

Brown said it would be premature to discuss anything further until the Corps makes its final decision.

Brook said the New Hill Community Association wants their mitigation plan to be incorporated into the Corps statement, which Henry Wicker of the Army Corps of Engineers says may be published in the next couple of weeks.

If that document endorses the New Hill site, then it would open the

door for permit applications and subsequent construction of the plant.

Brook says the mitigation plan in no way signals a retreat by those who have fought the New Hill site.

"While this plan constitutes a good faith effort by the New Hill Community Association to improve upon the sewage treatment plant, it does not signal the association's acceptance of Site 14," Brook said. "We're still weighing options to stop Site 14, which, if necessary, will include litigation."

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