

Justice for New Hill?

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Once again, the New Hill saga has taken another turn.

The Western Wake Partners are currently in the process of hiring a consultant to rework an **Environmental Justice study** on the area surrounding the **planned site** for a regional sewage plant.

The NC Department of Environment and Natural Resources sent a letter to the Partners in early October requesting a more accurate analysis.

In the letter, Division of Air Quality Deputy Director Coleen Sullins said the methodology used by the Partners "dilutes the percentages of minority population in the proximity of the proposed site and does not meet the Division's prescribed methodology." Sullins said the Partners needed to reevaluate the Environmental Justice demographics.

The Cary-led Partners, which also includes Apex, Holly Springs and Morrisville, plan to build the sewage plant in the middle of the New Hill community.

New Hill residents have argued that many low-income minorities living near the site will be adversely affected. Two churches and a nursing home are also located nearby.

According to New Hill Community Association President Paul Barth, this is the second time the Partners have

Justice: New Hill residents pleased with state's actions

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

provided the state with questionable data.

Using census information that encompassed much of Apex rather than focusing on the New Hill area, the Partners claimed that residents living near the planned site were only 15 to 20 percent minority. That number was eventually changed to 87 percent.

In their latest Environmental Justice figures, the Partners have claimed the median income of residents near the site is over \$49,000.

Barth said the Partners are attempting to skewer the numbers.

"They are trying to dilute the numbers and this is their second go-around," said Barth. "We want the state to hold their feet to the fire. They have the median income at around \$49,000 to \$60,000 and that is

nowhere near the case."

The state is also asking the Partners to analyze Environmental Justice numbers on all 13 potential sites studied by consultants, not just the three sites selected by the Partners as the most favorable.

Cary Town Manager Bill Coleman wrote a letter to Sullins apologizing for the miscue.

Kim Fisher, Cary's director of public works and utilities, said the correspondence with the state and the request to supply more information is "all part of the process."

"It has been at least 20 years since we built a facility like this and back then Environmental Justice wasn't even on the radar," said Fisher. "We thought we did it in accordance with guidelines set by the federal government but (state agencies) were not exactly satisfied.

"This is all part of the proce-

sure. We are hiring consultants who will get all the information we need pulled together."

Fisher said the consultants will probably finish with the study in January and the information will be forwarded to the state.

He also noted that plans for building the facility remain on schedule.

Meanwhile, residents in New Hill remain optimistic that state agencies will do what local elected representatives did not even attempt — keep a sewage plant out of the heart of the community.

"There have been a lot of doomsayers, a lot of people who thought the state would roll over and just let them build it," said Barth. "But I'm pleasantly surprised at how the state has responded. They seem to agree with us that it's not too late to stop this."