

## More secluded site rejected for 4 towns' sewage plant

**TOBY COLEMAN, Staff Writer**

Four Wake County towns could build a new sewage treatment plant in a more isolated area without significantly adding to the cost of the project, documents released by Cary officials Friday show.

Apex, Cary, Holly Springs and Morrisville are pushing a plan to build the plant within 1,000 feet of 23 homes in New Hill, an unincorporated community near the Shearon Harris Nuclear Plant in southern Wake County.

Earlier this fall, representatives of the towns met behind closed doors to discuss moving the proposed plant a couple of thousand feet west, so it would be within 1,000 feet of only one home, according to documents distributed at the meeting.

But the officials ended up rejecting the idea after looking at a comparison of sites prepared by consultants. Among other things, the consultants wrote that moving the plant west would increase the project's price from \$516 million to \$519 million -- less than 1 percent -- and limit the towns' ability to expand the plant in the future. Although the vote to uphold the existing site in New Hill marked another defeat for opponents of the plant, the meeting showed that the project still lacks the complete support of the elected officials responsible for financing it. In particular, members of Apex's Board of Commissioners are uneasy about plans to build the plant in New Hill.

Apex Commissioner Mike Jones found the more isolated land for the plant and asked Cary Mayor Ernie McAlister to call the meeting, which was held Sept. 20.

"I won't say I was satisfied with the outcome," Jones said. "I still would prefer that it be built on one or another of the alternate sites."

Jones has been lobbying against the towns' plans to build the plant in the middle of New Hill for months because he thinks it is too close to the community's churches, homes and now-vacant commercial hub.

It was a quiet effort, especially compared with that of New Hill residents who picketed the Apex and Cary town halls and Apex Commissioner Bill Jensen, who publicly called on the towns to build the sewage plant elsewhere. Instead of rallying against the plan, Jones looked for an alternate site for the plant. Eventually, he found an isolated 197-acre stretch of land just west of the 212-acre farm now targeted for the plant.

After he found the land, Jones said he approached McAlister at a meeting and asked

him to get the towns' consultants to evaluate his proposal.

McAlister said he agreed "as an accommodation" to a fellow elected official who had found a piece of land the towns had not considered before.

"There was never any serious consideration" given to moving the plant, he said. Instead, the towns just agreed to evaluate Jones' site using the same criteria as the other 29 locations considered, McAlister said.

Paul Barth, president of the New Hill Community Association, criticized the towns for rejecting Jones' proposal without holding a public meeting.

"Again, it goes to the secretive nature that this whole process has taken," he said. "Why would they not involve the New Hill people in a process that involves their town? What are they so afraid of?"

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