

Orange County Comprehensive Plan: Double Standards

"Do as I say, not as I do." Ethical dissonance. Here's an example: If a private company wanted to site an industrial facility in a rural/agricultural zone in Orange County lacking supporting infrastructure, the county would rightfully reply, "Absolutely not!" Yet at the moment, Orange County is poised to do just that.

County commissioners adopted a beautifully worded comprehensive plan with commendable principles - values we likely supported with our votes - promising "natural resource protection" and "preservation of the rural buffer." Like many of us, the Board believes "sustainability" is our goal and includes ambitions to "help preserve/conserve rural and agricultural land," and "reduce growth in carbon emissions by achieving compact development patterns."

Yet that is completely out of alignment with the county's current plan to site an industrial waste transfer station in the midst of historic White Cross in Bingham Township. It would be on a two lane road, with no water or sewer, in forested wildlife habitat, next to 800 acres of generational farmland, on an already compromised Collins Creek and watershed for the Haw River, upstream from protected fish and mussels, on wetlands and near sludge fields, and as far away as trucks can drive from trash generation, increasing carbon emissions.

Their comprehensive plan also wisely calls for fiscal responsibility. However, the county has yet to be able to show what this project will cost. Ranges from \$5-12 million have been floated for construction alone (not including an inflated land price and excessive acreage), with operational cost projections non-existent.

Building a waste transfer station commits us to 10-20 years of the environmentally and socially unfair practice of dumping solid waste into landfills in rural parts the South. It's time to end that

injustice and utilize sustainable technologies, turning waste into electricity.

We need strong leadership and intergovernmental cooperation. Their plan calls to: "Maintain a cooperative and joint process among the county, the municipalities, and water and wastewater providers." But so far, towns that generate the trash have not taken responsibility for managing it - preferring to dump the problem onto an unrepresented rural population that hauls its own trash.

Do we trust words or actions?

Nobody wants to think about trash. This problem may not be in your neck of the woods, but it is in the midst of the picturesque woods and farmland that make Orange County an idyllic place to live. If Orange County government does not live up to its own aspirations this time, your neck of the woods could be next.

We are tired of politicians saying one thing and doing another - at every level of government. Cost-effective and sustainable waste solutions have been offered by informed citizens for the short and long term. There are better choices that will sustain and protect Orange County's rich natural heritage.

Virginia Leslie

Orange County