

Cover Letter for Press Release

Attached is a press release about the responses of experts to the Environmental Assessment (EA) prepared by Olver, Inc. on behalf of Orange County. This report pertains to siting a waste transfer station in Bingham Township (the Howell Forest). The press release includes links to OrangeCountyVoice.org which contains all the relevant documents (the county's Environmental Assessment and all the expert responses that have been submitted to the state clearinghouse).

Please notice that in addition to misleading statements and errors, Mr. Conner's comments are critical of the county's decision to grant itself unlimited zoning authority. He has learned that Orange County has inserted "government use" as an allowable use under every zoning category. This essentially means that the county believes it can site any government facility – a waste transfer station, an airport, a prison, anything – anywhere it chooses without consulting with the surrounding community.

Although not relevant in the responses to the EA, it's worth noting that jurisdictional wetlands and endangered aquatic species were exclusionary criteria in the Olver study. These resources were not mapped on the Howell site (or other Bingham sites) and discovered after the site selection process was completed. Rather than excluding the site based on this new information, the county has elected to defer action until comments are received from the state (as per Gayle Wilson in a statement on March 15).

We hope you agree that this information is important for our citizens. Expert contact information is provided in the press release.

Thank you,

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Experts criticize County's Waste Transfer Station Report and Zoning

Environmental experts and attorney Jim Conner are strongly critical of a report filed by Orange County describing the environmental impact of a waste transfer station in rural Bingham Township. In separate reports to the state, Conner and the others accuse the county of filing a report that neglects or misrepresents important facts about jurisdictional wetlands, endangered species, alternatives analysis and impacts to rural/residential character. In his letter to the state clearinghouse that administers the report and responses, Mr. Conner asks the state to require the county to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement, a more thorough analysis of environmental conditions and impacts.

The county's report was prepared by consultant Olver, Inc. who is in line to be awarded a long-term consulting project from Orange County if the WTS project goes forward. The county's report, Mr. Conner's comments and expert statements have all been filed with the state clearinghouse and are available online at <http://www.orangecountyvoice.org/hottopics/wastetransferstation.html>

In his letter to the clearinghouse, Mr. Conner strongly objects to an ordinance that allows officials to site a government facility anywhere – regardless of local zoning. “In an amazing act of government arrogance, the County has decreed that it can put anything it wants to, anywhere it wants to, regardless of the effect on legitimate landowner uses of the surrounding land that have relied on the protection of that zoning” states Mr. Conner in his letter to the state.

“In addition to causing unnecessary irreparable damage to the environment, the county has given itself unlimited authority to bypass the zoning ordinances which are designed to protect this community and every community in the county. The fox is guarding the hen house. I'd be surprised if Orange County citizens knew that their zoning protection has been taken away and that the county can site any government facility – an airport, a waste transfer station, a jail, anything – anywhere it chooses.” said Tony Blake of Orange County Voice (OCV).

“This is exactly why industrial projects of this nature should not be sited in a greenfield – an undeveloped part of the county where there's no water, sewer or road infrastructure to support it. In addition to the wetlands that have already been compromised, there are habitats and a unique rural character that won't survive the noise, safety and other concerns due to constant truck traffic, litter and other aspects of this industrial operation. This is all in addition to the expenses -- which are now likely to go up to address environmental mitigation” says Susan Walser, also of Orange County Voice (OCV).

OCV played a major role in securing qualified professional responses to the county's report.

Michael M. Hughes, PE, an environmental engineer working with OCV, provided two reports earlier this month to the state, the county and the commissioners. Mr. Hughes' reports document jurisdictional wetlands which may have already been compromised by a new road connection for the WTS which the county permitted without proper authorization from the state. “Personally, I find this situation to be a disgrace to the county and our citizens. The county has created a system in which it holds itself to a lesser standard than is used for our citizens and local businesses. Furthermore, the County continues to rely on a consultant, who has a clear vested interest in fees from the design and construction of this project. Why is the county allowing the consultant to overlook important facts and issue a misleading report on behalf of Orange County? It's time to dismiss Olver and restore good sense to the important decisions we have to make about how we handle our waste. “

Orange County Voice has also secured critical statements from wetlands delineator Mark Seelinger

and the North Carolina Natural Heritage Program. All of these statements are online at <http://www.orangecountyvoice.org/hottopics/wastetransferstation.html>

Bonnie Hauser adds “We are grateful to the extraordinary professionals who, at their own personal expense, helped to uncover the sad truth about the county's plans. We hope the commissioners will finally stop this project and start a genuine search for a suitable site near town where the waste is generated and use vendors in the meantime. This is an important decision that we will have to live with for a long time. Orange County Voice is committed to help find a win-win alternative that we all can be proud of. “

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