

Siting a Waste Transfer Station in Orange County

Several years ago, the Orange County commissioners began a search for an alternative means of waste disposal. The Eubanks Road landfill is projected to be full in the spring of 2011 so in 2007, the county set on a path to site a **waste transfer station (WTS)** at the Eubanks recycling center that's next door. A WTS is used to transfer trash from curbside collection trucks to large hauling trucks used to haul the trash to a landfill far away.

The nearby Rogers Road community objected to the county's plan since they had hosted the landfill for nearly 40 years. This community already suffers groundwater contamination, vermin and odors, illegal dumping and other assaults that occur from living near a landfill. Promises from elected officials for water and sewer and other amenities have not been met. The community mobilized as RENA/CEER (Rogers Eubanks Neighborhood Association and Community to End Environmental Racism) and filed an EPA complaint against the county, and based on their experience, argued that waste facilities should not be sited in anyone's backyard.

In early 2008, the county retained Olver, Inc – a consultant that builds waste transfer stations to look at alternative sites. They used a standard process that considered exclusionary, technical and community criteria. The consultant, who is unfamiliar with the area, relied primarily on GIS for information about potential sites.

The commissioners, led by Olver, spent 8 months developing criteria and weightings – some of which were misapplications of the EPA criteria. For example, the EPA recommends that the facility be sited near a highway, sewer, water and power. Rural highway 54 – which has nearly 200 active driveways and cross streets, and is used by school buses, farm equipment and cyclists was included in the definition. The EPA recommends siting in an industrial area of 10 acres because no matter how large the land parcel, the site can't buffer the impact of the traffic and noise. The county instead allowed 25 acre sites in rural residential areas to be used.

Since Olver relied on GIS, inappropriate sites such as the gateway to Hillsborough where a large mixed-use development (Waterstone) is being built and six sites in rural Bingham Township were proposed. Smaller sites or sites that can be created by combining parcels were not considered.

Olver allowed the commissioners to set a 12 mile distance using an abstracted notion of a “waste centroid” - the center of waste collection (which coincidentally is the site of the Eubanks landfill) without considering drive times or other factors. The EPA suggests that a more flexible model where a WTS is sited within 10 miles from the end of collection routes – which can be redesigned.

Olver mistakenly released scorings based on technical criteria alone, and the Eubanks Road and Hillsborough sites were ranked highest. These communities mobilized quickly. RENA/CEER objected strongly and Hillsborough's town council threatened annexation. Immediately thereafter, Olver then released complete scores (which included community criteria) where three sites on West Hwy 54 in rural Bingham Township ranked highest and were selected for further study. **Scores were developed by Olver without input from the commissioners or the community.**

Orange County Voice, with the support of its members, joined with citizen groups from RENA/CEER Hillsborough to find more feasible and sustainable options. This coalition presented a one hundred page report to County Commissioners in early December providing evidence opposing all of Olver's sites. The report further proposed alternative sites that do fit EPA criteria, and added information about long-term sustainable options such as waste-to-energy production.

Despite limitations of the site evaluation, on December 11, 2008, the Board of Commissioners voted 5 to 1 (one member absent) to pursue purchase of one of two sites on NC 54 near Orange Grove Road – a 142 acre property known as the Howell Forest or a nearby tract used by OWASA to dump biosolids (sludge). The final county report suggested the large tract could be used for future unnamed solid waste projects. At that December 11 meeting, attorney James Conner, representing local businesses and residents opposed to the sites, notified the Board that legal action would result if the land on 54 is purchased for a waste transfer site.

In January 2009, **Orange County Voice** provided information on an economically feasible alternative to the Board and staff. After speaking to leading local vendors, OCV learned that vendors could provide waste transfer services to the county for the short or long term. It could save the county money and, most importantly, provide time to find a suitable site. In the December 11th report, the county estimated \$5-7 mm to build a facility (without land) and provided no estimates on operating costs.

Our Position: Orange County Voice believes that county should terminate all work on the rural west Hwy 54 sites because they are too far from where the waste is generated and are not suitable for this industrial development. Instead the county should find a suitable site – close to or in town, and in an industrial area near a highway (I-40 or I-85) and power. Any site selected should be part of a plan to move to a sustainable waste management solution for the long term – such as waste to energy. Vendors can be employed to handle the county's needs until a suitable option is found.

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