Letter to the Editor: Proposed Creedmoor Waste Water Treatment Plant

Some of the ideas regarding this proposed plant were covered in your Newspaper article of February 7th. The city must decide whether to join SGWASA as a full voting member and continue to use the SGWASA system for waste treatment or “go independent” with its own treatment plant.

In trying to understand the need for the proposed Creedmoor wastewater treatment plant, costing somewhere between 27 and 34 million dollars, I have read the city’s Public Notice for this proposal, talked with the Executive Director of the Southern Granville Water and Sewer Authority (SGWASA), read the comments offered by the SGWASA office on the Environmental Assessment Study undertaken by the City for this proposed project and spoken with a City Planning Administrator and several County Commissioners.

I have also studied a letter from several environmental groups which comment on the proposed plant; Clean Water for North Carolina and the Pamlico-Tar River Foundation. They have professionally trained biologists and water quality personnel on their staff and hence are quite expert on the present and predicted future condition of the Tar River ecosystem into which the effluent from the proposed plant will flow.

The City states that the purpose of the project is: (1) “to provide adequate wastewater collection, treatment and disposal facilities to support the 20 year projected residential, commercial, institutional, and industrial growth needs in the city of Creedmoor’s wastewater service area;”

and (2) “The proposed project is needed to address concerns associated with protecting public health in addition to the limitations of SGWASA’s capacity to meet Creedmoor’s current and future wastewater treatment needs.”

One would hope that the City authorities would use critical thinking and sound reasoning to make the decision for such a huge investment in the proposed plant. But there are serious contradictions in what the City states is the availability of capacity from SGWASA and what SGWASA states is the actual available capacity. SGWASA tells me it is currently using only half of its actual capacity and could provide sewage treatment well into the future (see below). SGWASA has also done a cost comparison which indicates the project is exorbitant. Taxes would apparently be substantially increased for the citizens of Creedmoor if a new plant is built.

Here is the summary from SGWASA: “In conclusion, based on SGWASA’s system-wide growth patterns, SGWASA can serve all the citizens of southern Granville County for at least the next 20 years with the proposed Wastewater Treatment Plant Improvements that have already been approved for funding and construction. This project is projected to cost $29.1 million dollars. This cost is included in the Cost Comparison Section above. To place another burden of $34.3 million dollars (City’s EA Alternative Number 1, Table 2.3, page 23) on the City’s citizens seems unnecessary at this time when a cost effective and viable alternative is available to all of the citizens in Southern Granville County.”

I would hope that the City can explain to us the serious contradictions seen between their growth/capacity projections and cost analysis compared with the statements from SGWASA.

Just as important as the above capacity and cost analysis problems is the evaluation from the environmental groups cited above. Their analysis, described on five pages which cannot be adequately summarized here, describes the current assaults on the low flowing, already drought challenged Tar River. This small River with low flowing waters cannot assimilate the waste from an additional source and the greater frequency of flooding increases the probabilities of sewer overflows and/or threatens the integrity of the treatment plant itself.

Here is a quote from these groups regarding other problems: “The River is already designated a Nutrient Sensitive Water (NSW) since 1989. More than a decade’s worth of nutrient management efforts have unfortunately not improved the Pamlico estuary, as nutrient impairment continues. Management efforts include reduction of nitrogen and phosphorus from wastewater discharge, new development and agricultural sources. Even with these management and regulatory efforts in place, the Tar River has experienced an increase in organic nitrogen concentrations. Furthermore, the expansion of unregulated sources of nutrients, such as ammonia from industrial animal operations and an unregulated poultry industry, only further threaten the integrity of the river system.”

The Upper Tar River Basin is nationally recognized for the number of rare and endangered aquatic species that reside in this watershed.

The conclusion of these environmental groups:

“We believe that other alternatives should be considered first and that the City would have a difficult time defending a position that a new discharge to the Tar River would be the least environmentally damaging alternative.”

I hope that the city has answers to their apparently poorly thought out proposed waste water treatment plant project and can explain the contradictions noted above regarding SGWASA capacity and projections. And perhaps they can also provide answers to the critical issue of likely environmental damage the plant would cause to the Tar River if ever built.

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