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2007 09 27

County delays waste transfer station plan


By Taylor Sisk
Staff Writer

Residents of the Rogers Road community saw some movement this week in their effort to stop a transfer station from being placed in their neighborhood after having made appeals to county and town elected officials.

Last Thursday night, Nelo Jones, a Rogers Road resident, spoke before the Assembly of Governments and an overflow audience at the Southern Human Services Center, urging that concerned citizens and their elected officials “do what’s right and bring environmental justice to the Rogers-Eubanks Community.”

Jones had been chosen by her community to speak in protest of the unanimous decision in March by the Orange County Board of Commissioners to place a waste transfer station in that community. She further asked that the community’s grievances be heard. (See “For the Record, page 6, for her entire statement.)

On Tuesday of this week, Orange County Manager Laura Blackmon sent a letter to Chapel Hill Town Manager Roger Stancil requesting that the county be allowed to “resubmit its application for the rezoning of property it owns related to a transfer station to be located at the County landfill on Eubanks Road.”

Blackmon wrote that the public hearing on the waste transfer station scheduled for October 25 is “premature.”

“It is the County’s intention to revise its application and submit the revised application in time for the March 2008 JPA Public Hearing process,” she wrote.

A ‘culturally rich’ community.

Jones’s statement to the assembly began: “For nearly one hundred and fifty years, African-American families have lived in what is now known as the Rogers-Eubanks Community.”

In just over five minutes, Jones offered eloquent sketchings of a history of which few in the broader Orange County community are aware, describing how in an area that stretches from Homestead Road to Eubanks and Millhouse roads, “land was passed down to children, to grandchildren, to great-grandchildren, and in some cases, to great-grandchildren.

“Today, this community is a predominantly low-income neighborhood, but it remains socially cohesive and culturally rich in spite of the solid waste facilities that have worked to destroy it.”

As Jones completed her statement, she was met with a loud ovation from the audience.

An overflow crowd.

Thursday’s gathering was by no means a routine Assembly of Government affair. The newly formed Rogers-Eubanks Coalition to End Environmental Racism had requested five minutes to speak at the outset of the meeting, but as the assembly was called to order, that request had not yet been granted.

Orange County commission Chair Moses Carey opened the session, noting that, “This is probably the most well-attended AOG meeting we’ve had in years.” Perhaps 40 people filled the gallery seats and lined the side and back

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walls of the room.

While observing that it was unprecedented for public input to be granted in AOG proceedings, Carey put the request before the assembly. A motion was made to allow a representative of the coalition to speak, the motion was seconded, and a round of “ayes” then confirmed it.

Jones took the microphone and in her allotted time told of how in 1972, when the Town of Chapel Hill decided to use 120 acres of land on Eubanks Road for a landfill, the community was told by then-Mayor Howard Lee that if it accepted the landfill for ten years it would then be closed and that a park and other basic amenities would be provided.

“That was 35 years ago,” said Jones, “and in spite of the fact that Orange County prides itself on being aggressively opposed to social and environmental injustice, it has refused to honor decades of broken promises made to the Rogers-Eubanks Community.”

Jones explained that while “some people believe that closing the landfill and building a transfer station will improve conditions in the community, we contend that it will not. Along with the transfer station, garbage collection trucks, and 18-wheelers we will still have the vermin, the stench, more air pollutants, and more noise. We will also have increased traffic that poses increased danger to our children and other citizens.”

“So our question tonight is this,” said Jones. “Why are low-income communities and communities where people of color live always the most vulnerable to solid waste facilities?”

Jones then stated the coalition’s demands:

- to immediately eliminate the Rogers-Eubanks Road Community as a site for the proposed solid waste transfer station;
- to halt all solid-waste activities in this community no later than November 2009;
- for the promises made to the community over the past 35 years to be honored; and
- for quality-of life issues to be immediately addressed by providing the community with municipal water and sewer services and other community enhancements to ensure the health and safety of its residents.

On Monday night, members of the coalition spoke at the Chapel Hill Town Council meeting, asking that the council deny the zoning permit for placing the waste transfer station on Eubanks Road.

On April 27, the county sent to the town council a petition requesting expedited processing of applications for the placement of the transfer station. But on Tuesday, Blackmon sent to Stancil the letter requesting that the county be allowed to resubmit its application for the permit at a later date.

Posted by Editor on Thursday, September 27th, 2007, at 8:06 am, and filed under News.

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