

The Rogers-Eubanks “Coalition to End Environmental Racism” (CEER)

Background

For nearly one hundred and fifty years, African-American families have lived in what is now known as the Rogers-Eubanks Community. In the late 1800s, Rogers Road was a wagon-track through black-owned family farmland and sawmills that stretched from Homestead to Eubanks and Millhouse Roads. There was once a school on Eubanks Road, founded by a former slave, for black children not allowed to attend school elsewhere. As decades passed, black-owned family farmland was passed down to children and grandchildren. Other land was lost to debt or simply sold. However, African Americans continued migrating to this community; they continued to purchase land and establish homes. Today, a predominantly low-income neighborhood, the Rogers and Eubanks Community nevertheless remains socially cohesive and culturally rich.

In 1972, when the Town of Chapel Hill purchased 80 acres of land on Eubanks Road near this community to use as a landfill—this was a thriving community; it was a community strongly opposed to having a landfill near them. However, Howard Lee, mayor of Chapel Hill, convinced the community to accept the landfill for ten years, promising that afterwards no other landfills would be opened near them and a park and other basic amenities would be provided when the landfill closed.

That was 35 years ago.

Promises Broken

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. This community still awaits the park and basic amenities it was promised. Local governments continue to expand solid waste facilities on Eubanks Road: since 1972, two municipal solid waste landfills have been opened; two industrial waste landfills have been opened. There are yard and hazardous waste collection sites, recycling and garbage drop-off centers, a Materials Recovery landfill (MRF), and let's not forget about that huge, toxic, smelly leachate pond right next to Mrs. Gertrude Nunn's property. The newest proposed addition to these ever-expanding waste facilities is a solid waste transfer station.

Low-income communities always the most vulnerable

In its March 2000 report, the National Environmental Justice Advisory Council concluded that “WTS are sited disproportionately in areas adjacent to poor communities and communities of color.” On September 2, 2007 *The New York Times* reported that “low-income communities . . . shelter most of America's polluting facilities” and that African Americans are “79 percent more likely than whites to live in areas where air-pollution levels pose health risks.” Professor Robert Bullard of Clark Atlanta University, a pioneer and expert in environmental justice issues since 1978, says that “the people who live closest” to “a lot of different waste facilities” are the people “who have the fewest resources,” those who are “most vulnerable.” This “doesn't mean that [they] should be dumped on.”

On March 3, 2006, the Solid Waste Advisory Board (SWAB) passed a resolution recommending that the solid waste transfer station be located on Eubanks Road. Why? Because Eubanks Road was convenient, because the County could put the transfer station here cheaply and would be saved the hassle of having to search for another site. And there was a good chance the community would not object too loudly. On March 27, 2007, the Orange County Board of Commissioners voted unanimously to accept this recommendation from SWAB to locate the transfer station on Eubanks Road.

What we are asking for tonight

The Roger-Eubanks Road Community wants Orange County to stop dumping garbage and toxic waste in their backyard – and that's exactly why we're here tonight. The Rogers-Eubanks “Coalition to End Environmental Racism” (CEER) supports the Rogers-Eubanks Community in its demands for environmental justice. These demands include:

- Immediately eliminating the Rogers-Eubanks Road Community as a site for the proposed solid waste transfer station and halting all solid waste activities in the Rogers-Eubanks Community no later than November 2009.
- Honoring the promises made to the Rogers-Eubanks Road Community over the past 35 years for having endured the negative impacts of solid waste activities.
- Immediately addressing quality of life issues by providing this community with municipal water and sewer services and other community enhancements to ensure the health and safety of the residents.

All of us here tonight have a lot of work to do, and we are certain that having heard this information, you will do what's right and bring environmental justice back to the Rogers-Eubanks community. **Thank you.**