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Transfer station is election issue

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CHAPEL HILL -- Residents angered by Orange County's plans to put a garbage transfer station in their predominantly black neighborhood have been fighting it for months.

Now they've made it an election issue, claiming the proposal violates a decades-old promise not to stack future piles of town trash near their homes.

Incumbents on the Chapel Hill Town Council, which will have to approve a rezoning for the transfer station, say they can't legally discuss the issue.

That hasn't kept their challengers from speaking up. Challenger Matt Czajkowski has called the county's transfer station plan "an absolute outrage." Fellow challenger Will Raymond has identified the council as "the last resort" for the Rogers Road community.

Residents of Rogers Road, a mostly black community just outside Chapel Hill, say they agreed to the landfill in the 1970s in exchange for neighborhood improvements and a promise that future landfills would go elsewhere.

They've put up with the community's trash for 35 years. The landfill smells bad, pollutes their well water and draws pests and buzzards, they say.

Robert Campbell promised he and his neighbors will make "no concession" on the transfer station issue. He and others have lodged a complaint with the Department of Justice about the siting of the transfer station.

Orange County Commissioner Barry Jacobs said the board's decision was not based on race or socioeconomic status. Asked whether the county might consider looking at other sites, he said: "I don't know. I'm willing to think about it. I am thinking about it."

The mayor's and four of the eight council members' seats are up in Chapel Hill's elections Nov. 6.



Staff photo by Sam Spies

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Council members are supposed to remain impartial, or the council's decision could be overturned in court. Still, incumbents Sally Greene and Cam Hill have urged the commissioners to consider alternative sites.

"No one believes that they've done a real search," Hill told the local League of Women Voters on Oct. 1.

Mayoral challenger Kevin Wolff also called for an alternate site, but incumbent Mayor Kevin Foy said that would require support from residents, none of whom seem to want a garbage facility near their homes.

Incumbent Town Council member Bill Strom said county staff needs to come before the council "arm in arm" with the Rogers Road neighbors.

"If that can't be achieved, it's going to be very difficult for me to support the permit," he said.

Said Raymond: "We need to make it clear that if they don't take care of our neighbors on Rogers Road, then we will."

But there are several advantages to putting the solid waste transfer station at the landfill site, said Gayle Wilson, county solid waste management director.

Eubanks Road is centrally located, making it more efficient to haul garbage to the site, he said.

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