

Response to Commissioner Rich  
BOCC October 14, 2014 regarding Solid Waste  
Jan Sassaman, Chair  
Commission for the Environment

Penny Rich asked for detail/clarification on the solid waste recommendation that “Orange County should continue to reduce the amount of solid waste sent to landfills ... and stop trucking Orange County solid waste to the Durham County transfer station.” Clarification of this issue is a complex one and could not be provided within the time-frame of the meeting.

The concern is two-fold; one aspect concerns the ethical issues associated with disposing of our solid waste on another community or jurisdiction instead of dealing with it ourselves, and another is the set of issues associated with the myriad environmental concerns associated with trucking our waste to a locus north of Durham on well-trafficked roads to a facility over which the County has no control. The latter set of issues consists mostly of environmental and regulatory concerns. The present temporary process is to transport waste from the County using mostly collection vehicles. This practice is inefficient, expensive, unsafe, and environmentally unsound. The extra miles traveled per truckload delivered to the transfer station would:

- Increase per-load delivery times, thus requiring more labor hours to deliver each load to a tip,
- add wear and tear (and thus maintenance requirements) to vehicles, some of which are not necessarily designed or geared for highway travel,
- increase fuel costs,
- incur increased exposure of truck operators, and other drivers, to potential road accidents,
- increase vehicular emissions, and
- result in a lack of enforcement of Orange County disposal regulatory bans.

The most ethical and environmentally appropriate action is to reduce the amount of material that we must dispose of, through waste reduction, recycling, or reuse, and then convert the final waste residue into some useable commodity such as gas, heat, or biomass. Current technologies are not economically, and in some cases technically, viable for dealing with the relatively small amounts of waste generated here in Orange County. This leaves us with several options to dispose of waste locally:

- taking our waste to a regional alternative disposal site (mass burn or other type of facility) with problems similar to hauling to the Durham facility or hosting a large facility here in the County,
- developing a new County landfill, with familiar problems of siting close to urban areas, and the problems associated with distance hauling in remote northern parts of the County, or
- building a waste transfer station somewhere in Orange County that would allow us to deliver short-haul to the station by collection vehicles, with the waste transferred to larger capacity long-haul vehicles for transport to landfills of our choosing.

The first option, a large regional energy conversion facility would either be unacceptable (if close to urban areas) or require a transfer station if located remotely in the County. This leaves us, as a County, with the option of imposing a landfill or a waste transfer station somewhere relatively close to the population centroid. Landfilling in Orange County, especially close to the population centroid, is not likely to be an option, leaving, ultimately, the need for a waste transfer station.

A waste transfer station would still require us to impose our waste on some other community, but if sited properly, could mitigate some of the concerns associated with our present practice, such as decreased labor hours, decreased wear and tear on vehicles, decreased fuel costs and emissions, reduced accident potential, and the ability of Orange County to monitor waste movement and enforce County regulations.

This then leads to the issue of waste transfer station siting. This involves environmental, practical, and political considerations. It needs to be close to the population centroid, close to roadways, sited to accommodate state siting regulations, and in a location that is socially acceptable. The present Eubanks Road solid waste facility is an ideal location for a transfer station and should be reconsidered, with a tip fee surcharge on materials handled by the station used to fund additional community improvements. Two other locations, the area just north of the Chapel Hill Public Works facility and a portion of the UNC-CH Horace Williams tract have been discussed and merit consideration.

In the final analysis, the solution will boil down to a political one and will require a great deal of political will to accomplish.