

**ORANGE COUNTY
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**

ACTION AGENDA ITEM ABSTRACT

Meeting Date: November 17, 2009

**Action Agenda
Item No.** 6-d

SUBJECT: Review and Discussion of Proposal Regarding No Fault Privately-Owned Well Repair Policy for Properties Near the Orange County Landfill

DEPARTMENT: County Manager

PUBLIC HEARING: (Y/N)

No

ATTACHMENT(S):

Orange County Solid Waste Landfill Impact
Zone – No Fault Privately Owned Well
Repair Policy (Proposal)

INFORMATION CONTACT:

Frank Clifton, County Manager, 245-2300

Orange County Landfill Area 2008 with
3,000 Foot Buffer Selection

PURPOSE: To provide the Board with an opportunity to review and discuss a proposal regarding a no fault privately-owned well repair policy for properties near the Orange County Landfill and provide feedback and direction to staff.

BACKGROUND: In 1999, Orange County, the Town of Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro and the Town of Hillsborough entered into agreement whereby Orange County (subject to the terms of the agreement) assumed the solid waste management responsibility for the disposal of solid waste county-wide. Among the many items covered in detail with the agreement were provisions for the County to address various improvements within the 'area' neighboring the landfill property at the time the agreement was established.

Since the County has assumed the responsibility for managing the Solid Waste Landfill property and its functions, residents have expressed concerns pertaining to several issues including unconfirmed or documented failures of personal, privately-owned wells and septic systems serving individual residents within the general area of the landfill.

In 2002, the Orange County Board of Public Health and the Orange County Board of Commissioners adopted a No Fault Well Repair Fund Policy as part of resolving issues associated with a mining operation conducted by Martin Marietta elsewhere within Orange County. Circumstances differ substantially from that of the Solid Waste Landfill operation but the parameters of this policy do align with the general aspects of addressing failed or failing personally owned private wells and septic systems.

Similar in concept to the policy established in 2002 referenced above a well repair fund could be established that would be funded via revenues generated by the Solid Waste operations. If the Board supports this approach to addressing the well problems of residents within an impact

area (3,000 feet of the landfill's boundary) of the existing landfill operation, staff can formulate the policy; meet with the landfill partners to assure concurrence; and once approved by the Board, initiate contact with residents within the impact area served by a non public water supply.

If the BOCC concurs with this approach, staff will initiate the actions necessary to bring a formal policy back to the Board for consideration and approval. There are several steps to be pursued. Since many of the basic parameters for this effort have been addressed within the scope of the program currently in place related to the Martin Marietta quarry project, a timely response and follow up should occur.

FINANCIAL IMPACT: There is no financial impact associated with review and discussion of this item and providing feedback and direction to staff.

RECOMMENDATION(S): The Manager recommends that the Board review and discuss the proposal regarding a no fault privately-owned well repair policy for properties near the Orange County Landfill and provide feedback and direction to staff.

ORANGE COUNTY SOLID WASTE LANDFILL IMPACT ZONE – NO FAULT PRIVATELY OWNED WELL REPAIR POLICY (PROPOSAL)

In 1999, Orange County, the Town of Chapel Hill, the Town of Carrboro and the Town of Hillsborough entered into agreement whereby Orange County (subject to the terms of the agreement) assumed the solid waste management responsibility for the disposal of solid waste county-wide.

Among the many items covered in detail with that agreement were provisions for the county to address various improvements within the 'area' neighboring the land fill property at the time the agreement was established.

Page 9-10 of the agreement provides:

PART 6. The County will finance community benefits from system funds to the extent legally permissible.

The Parties will cooperate to provide public benefits to the community of residents and property owners in the neighborhood of the existing landfill.

The Parties note the expected forthcoming report of the Landfill Benefits Committee that has been studying the question of community benefits. Upon the release of the report, each Part shall provide for its Governing Board to discuss the working group's proposal for community benefits, and shall provide for such legal and other staff analysis of the proposed list as it may deem appropriate (especially including legal analysis concerning the use of System funds to pay the costs of such benefits). After each Party has completed its own analysis, the Parties shall work together, diligently and in good faith, to reach an agreement as to community benefits to be provided. The purpose of determining community benefits shall continue to include participation by persons belonging to the relevant community. Final determinations of the public benefits to be provided, the sources of financing and the mechanisms for providing the benefits, however, shall be made only by further agreement of all the Parties.

The Parties state their preference that benefits be financed from System funds to the extent permitted by law. To the extent permitted by law and by generally accepted accounting principles, to the extent determined by the Parties and notwithstanding any other provision of this Agreement, the costs of providing public benefits as described in this Part 6 may be treated as an expense of the System and may be paid from System Revenues.

The public benefits contemplated by this Section are to be considered as separate and distinct from any compensation determined to be owed for any "taking" of an interest in property as determined by State or Federal law.

Action taken to address any issue determined to fall within the scope of the agreement of the Parties is subject to revenues attributed to the operation of the landfill or the willingness of the Parties to fund improvements beyond the scope of landfill revenues.

THE ISSUE FOR CONSIDERATION:

Since the County has assumed the responsibility for managing the Solid Waste Landfill property and its functions, over the years various citizens have complained about several issues including unconfirmed or documented failures of personal, privately owned wells and septic systems serving individual residents within the general area of the landfill.

It must be noted that the current landfill and its operations meet all established federal and state standards. There are numerous monitoring wells and various other environmental management activities in place that support the fact that the landfill has not been found to have had any direct impact on either the privately owned wells or septic systems within the area identified as being impacted by the landfill's location.

Numerous other factors could be impacting upon whether or not the privately owned wells and septic systems within the vicinity of the landfill meet established public health standards. Factors such as the age and uses applied to those systems; the depth of wells and techniques used in their initial installations as well as the location of wells and septic system within a close proximity; along with many other issues all could be factors resulting in individual failures of either or both systems at any particular location. Wells that are up-gradient from landfill operations likely are impacted by factors other than the landfill itself.

Surveys conducted by those other than the County's Public Health Department have presented evidence that individually owned wells within the neighborhoods near the landfill are not performing at acceptable public health standards. Knowledge of this fact does place the Board of Commissioners in a position of responsibility to pursue action aimed at corrective measures to ensure public health standards are met.

An unrelated set of circumstances may provide an example for use in establishing a course of action that could address the situation(s) outlined above in a manner consistent with the intent of the Parties to Solid Waste Management agreement of 1999.

In 2002, the Orange County Board of Public Health and the Orange County Board of Commissioners adopted a: **NO FAULT WELL REPAIR FUND POLICY** as part of resolving issues associated with a mining operation conducted by Martin Marietta elsewhere within Orange County. Circumstances differ substantially from that of the Solid Waste Landfill operation but the parameters of this policy do align with the general aspects of addressing failed or failing personally owned private wells and septic systems.

PAST EFFORTS AT SOLUTIONS

Efforts have been made by local governments to address the extension of public water and sewer systems in the general area of the Solid Waste Landfill. Several factors make the further extension of these public facilities both unlikely and prohibitively expensive:

1. This is a sparsely populated area impacting upon the cost per customer serviced
2. Many of these residential units are on large tracts of land located some distance from public rights of way meaning the cost of extending lines across private property could be a hurdle to providing services.
3. These areas border or exist in portions of the county where by agreement public utilities extensions may be prohibited.
4. There may be issues associated with the continuing monthly user costs to households for obtaining these public utility services and paying for them.
5. Based on the age of structures and plumbing fixtures within, service pressures from public water systems could require either pressure reducing equipment or replacement of plumbing within impacted structures.
6. Potential for rezoning, land use changes or the subdivision of larger parcels could impact the location of where utilities are to be extended.
7. The Solid Waste Enterprise Fund is committed to fund the on-going maintenance of the landfill for a period of thirty (30) years post closure. The SWEF can not provide a significantly large outlay of funding to support construction of an extensive public water and sewer system for the area surrounding the landfill.
8. Other issues.

PARAMETERS OF A NO FAULT WELL REPAIR FUND POLICY

Similar in concept to the policy established in 2002 referenced above a well repair fund could be established that would be funded via revenues generated by the Solid Waste operations. It is important that these issues be addressed sooner than later in that the actual operation of the landfill is scheduled to end within a short period of time. After that time, depending upon the course of action authorized by the Orange County Board of Commissioners, the revenue stream that supports the landfill operation may be drastically reduced. While the participating towns and county remain liable for the long term aspects of the landfills maintenance for 30 years after the landfill closes, budgetary constraints could impact upon positive responses to addressing these issues in the future.

If the Board of Commissioners supports this approach to addressing the well problems of residents within an impact area (3000 feet of the landfill's boundary) of the existing landfill operation, staff can formulate the policy; meet with the landfill partners to assure concurrence; and, once approved by the Board of Commissioners initiate contact with residents within the impact area served by a non public water supply.

In each case, the County Public Health Department would be involved in testing the wells and confirming the need for repair. In most cases, the County's effort would focus on repair or replacement of an existing well. IF, site conditions and or other conditions do not allow for a repair or replacement of an existing failed (failing) residential well,

consideration could be given to the possibility of extending a connection to a public water source if available. Those instances would be analyzed on a case by case basis and only pursued with agreement of the property owner with an understanding that the property owner or water user would have future responsibility for any user costs once the installation was complete.

SUMMARY

If the Board of Commissioners concurs with this approach, staff will initiate the actions necessary to bring a formal policy back to the Board for consideration and approval. There are several steps to be pursued. Since many of the basic parameters for this effort have been addressed within the scope of the program currently in place related to the Martin Marietta quarry project a timely response and follow up should occur.

Frank W. Clifton, Jr.
County Manager
11/3/9

LEGEND

- % Addresses
- Owasa Water Lines
- Owasa Service Laterals
- Streets
- ▨ Parcels with Wells (99)
- ▭ Orange Co. Landfill
- ▭ 3000' Landfill Buffer
- ▭ Parcels Within 3000'
- ▭ Parcels 2009

