

PUBLIC HEARING of January 30, 2002, with Mayor Buck Trott and Commissioners H. N. James, Ron Sanders, Amy Patterson, Mike Cavender, and Hank Ross present.

Also present were Richard Betz, Lamar Nix, Kurt Wright, Bob Goldstein, Ward Maroti, Kim Lewicki, Don Hendershot, Buzz Williams, Pat Boyd, Henrietta Norman, Clement Patton, Peg Jones, Jody & Carolyn Cook, Gerry Doubleday, Bob Wright, Peter Lintz, Edna Foster, Lee Byers, Katie Chenoweth, Jeremy Dooley, Robert Wyatt, Bill McLarney, Jim Graham, Shirley Johnson, and Jack Bornemann.

The Mayor called the Public Hearing to order at 7:00 p.m. He explained that the purpose was to hear a presentation from the Town's consulting engineer and environmental scientist, and to answer questions and receive comments from the public, on the Town's proposed expansion of the capacity of its existing 0.5 million gallons per day (MGD) Wastewater Treatment Plant (NPDES Permit No. NC0021407) to 1.5 MGD. The public hearing had been duly advertized for this time and place.

Each Board member had received copies of a Preliminary Engineering Report dated January 21, 2002, prepared by W. K. Dickson Company Inc., and copies were also available for the public. Several maps and plans from the report were displayed in the hearing room. The Mayor then introduced Kurt Wright, P. E., from W. K. Dickson Co., and Bob Goldstein and Ward Maroti of Robert J. Goldstein & Associates.

Kurt Wright proceeded to present an overview of the project, including the basic design of the existing Sequential Batch Reactor (SBR) facility, constructed in 1994 and permitted in 1999; the NPDES permit was scheduled to expire October 31, 2002, and the permit application would need to be submitted 180 days prior to that date. Because of the expectation of increased effluent limits, a decision had been made to go to tertiary treatment; although the effluent limits had still not been released by the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR), it was likely that the tertiary treatment would meet those standards. He then reviewed the combination of 20-year population projections and existing flow records used in the report, which indicated an average design flow for the period of 1.5 MGD.

Four alternatives had been explored: Option 1, Expanding the plant, with 100% surface water discharge of effluent; Option 2, spray irrigation of treatment plant effluent; Option 3, connecting to the Franklin or Cashiers systems; or Option 4, re-using the effluent at area golf courses. Option 1 was the most cost-effective option.

Bob Goldstein then introduced himself and his firm, which had specialized in environmental documents since 1985, and briefly described the requirements under the State Environmental Policy Act, which required preparation of an environmental document when public funds were spent. He said that the Environmental Assessment (EA) was a formal document that would be reviewed by several state agencies, with the hope that all of the agencies would eventually agree to a Finding of No Significant Impact. The EA was now in its scoping phase, with comments from the agencies due by February 15; those comments and recommendations would be incorporated into the EA. The EA would also address the environmental setting, the need for the expansion, disposal of effluent, and other environmental concerns. By trying to anticipate all possible recommendations and alternatives, it was expected that the process could be accelerated, and also that all of the issues could be addressed and damages avoided far more effectively than through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). He also said that one of the key components of the EA would be an analysis of what the Town was doing to control growth and mitigate the effects of growth through its land use program.

Ward Maroti reported that most of the work was complete, and that the completed draft would be ready in a matter of weeks.

Kurt Wright then reviewed in more detail the treatment process in the proposed project, which would include two new SBR tanks, new filters, and ultraviolet treatment, with chlorine as a backup. Bob Goldstein commented that the quality of water with tertiary treatment

would be pretty close to potable.

Mr. Wright then fielded several questions on the presentation. Gerry Doubleday asked about the flow in the Cullasaja River. Mr. Wright explained that the effluent limits would be based on the low flow, or "7Q10" in the river; when in full operation, he expected the plant would discharge no more than one tenth the flow in the river under driest conditions. Jim Graham asked about the quality of water in the river, and Mr. Wright explained that it would not have any adverse effects. Buzz Williams asked about the effects of stormwater, and Mr. Wright explained that due to an aggressive inflow and infiltration program, the Town had eliminated this problem.

The Mayor then invited each of the five persons who had signed up to speak to be heard.

Buzz Williams, representing the Jackson-Macon Conservation Alliance, commented that he had yet to see a sewage treatment facility that worked properly. He was concerned about the possibility of lowering water quality in the Cullasaja River, which he felt should be an outstanding resource water, not just a B-Trout river. He asked the Board to consider endorsing the State's Natural and Scenic Rivers designation for the river to recognize and protect it, and he felt that such an endorsement would not hamper the expansion of the Plant.

Peg Jones asked William McLarney, who had not signed up, to speak before she did. Dr. McLarney said that, although he had not planned to speak, he would make some comments on behalf of the Little Tennessee Watershed Association. He said that while he agreed a dose of skepticism was in order, he was impressed by the project; he had always felt that tertiary treatment was a good idea. He also said that he was concerned about water quality in the area between Lake Sequoyah and Dry Falls. But he felt that basically the project was a good start in the right direction.

Peg Jones, representing Save Our Rivers Inc., thanked the Board for going through this process. She said she had come with a prepared statement, but was not going to read it; she felt that the tertiary treatment would be effective in cleaning up the river. She also expressed some concerns over the increasing growth in Highlands, and re-iterated Mr. Williams's earlier request for endorsement of the Wild & Scenic River designation. She commented that this permit process was being closely watched, but thanked the Board for its courtesy in holding the hearing.

Jodie Cook, representing the Upper Cullasaja Watershed Association, also commented that tertiary treatment was an excellent choice, as was the SBR design. He was pleased to see this technology in use.

Peter Kintz, representing the Jackson-Macon Conservation Alliance, noted that the Cullasaja River and some of its tributaries above Lake Sequoyah were listed as impaired. He was impressed by the presentation, however. He asked when DENR's effluent limits would be released. Mr. Wright said he understood they would be available soon, and the information would be available to the public.

Bob Wright, representing the Upper Cullasaja Watershed Association, thanked the engineers for the professional presentation. He wondered about the NPDES permits in the entire river basin being due at the same time and the effect that might have. He also pointed out that most of the studies of water quality in the river had been based on microinvertebrate studies, but he was interested in water chemistry testing as well. He also felt detecting and handling upset conditions should be addressed.

The Mayor thanked those present for their comments. He also pointed out that, just because the Town was planning to expand its plant, that did not indicate there was anything wrong with the Town's existing plant or operations. He said that it was continuing to meet all limits, sampling was conducted by independent contractors, and the facility employed the best operators in the business. He asked if there were any other comments.

Buzz Williams commented that the NPDES reporting system relied on monthly averages, and daily spikes would not show up. He was also concerned that decisions would be made before DENR's effluent limits were released. Mr. Wright assured him that the effluent limits were due soon, and no decisions would be made before they were established.

Dr. McLarney commented, in general, that he had detected a considerable increase in pollution in several of the tributaries to the river; anything that could be done that would protect the river would benefit everybody.

There being no further comments from the public, the public hearing was declared adjourned by the Mayor at 8:20 p.m.

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Richard Betz, Town Clerk