

To the Contrary; Region Must be Involved in Wastewater Treatment

Duane F. Christopher, Letter to the Editor, The Herald, December 20, 2000

York County is at a pivotal place. We have the opportunity to create an environment for sound development and be good steward of the land and water.

Dec. 13, the Catawba Regional Wastewater Committee ended its pursuit of serving the public in its capacity of proposing solutions to our growing region. This may be just the opportunity to open a new door to a more comprehensive solution. What ended was a committee that had a more narrow focus and not the interest of the region as a whole. I am not speaking of the individual members' interest; I am speaking of the philosophy that guided the committee.

A brief look back on the reason the committee was formed: Area leaders have been prompted for over 10 years by our neighbor to the north - Mecklenburg County - to explore a single, large regional wastewater treatment plant. A large regional plant would help them solve their wastewater needs.

In response to their efforts, York, Chester, and Lancaster counties made a wise decision to work together. The past six years has been well documented; the tri-county area said that we were to come up with an independent study on the issue. This was a daunting task, especially if members were volunteering time when trying to bring forth issues that were contrary to the approach of the pilot of the committee's boat. The parties were very close in coming to a consensus and a plan.

Planning a wastewater treatment system for a large growing region is not simple or easy. Our overriding theme must and will be the Catawba River, our most precious resource. The river basin is the very reason we are here today. It is our living environment.

All Counties would benefit

All counties will benefit by a clean river. We need their support environmentally, politically and monetarily. With a broad base of support we will be successful in coming up with the final best solution. When our position is clear and succinct then we can go back to Mecklenburg, Gastonia and Union counties in north Carolina and prepare for agreements that are on South Carolina's terms.

Without a committee, the process now is uncertain. The approach by the state Legislature in passing laws preventing the wastewater from coming into our state is shortsighted and will make it more difficult to solve this problem locally. The rest of the state should understand that this is a local issue that will impact much of South Carolina in the near future.

We have an opportunity to solve the problem in a cooperative manner and provide a model for the rest of the state to use. The burden should not be left on the shoulders of the city of ROCK Hill and other small entities. They neither have the resources nor the physical capabilities to solve the total problems long term.

We would appreciate the the state's help; there is no doubt we need help. But we need constructive help. We need support in a positive way that doesn't stop us from solving the problem of dirty water coming downstream.

In June, the York Conservation district presented a report by Dr. Kevin White. White is a nationally known expert on alternative philosophies and methods of wastewater treatment design, including the regional approach.

A New Approach

It presented ideas of decentralization of facilities within a regional approach, which seeks to protect public health and the environment but also minimize cost. Specifically, White addressed traditional wastewater collection and treatment methods that may not be the best or most cost effective approach for our area.

I propose that a committee be formed out of this idea or a regional plan. The stewards of the land, the conservation districts of area counties, could initiate this plan. In addition, the committee needs to be represented by the county councils, planners, legislators, the Catawba Indian Nation, riverkeeper, DHEC, DNR, RC&D, as well as other parties of interest, specifically the homeowners along the river.

Now that the General Assembly has brought itself into the equation, it also needs to be a part of the solution. The Legislature must assist with resources to this planning process. Lawmakers are making decisions for us locally as well as one third of the state's population.

An ideal wastewater management plan would be a regional, address sustainable growth, be cost effective, and, foremost, protect the environment of the Catawba River. We have the people who are willing to work for these goals. We have the people who have worked long hours on this project and who do not want this process to stop at the point where we are beginning to make real progress.

We have the framework to accomplish this goal. We have the will to accomplish this task. Work of the past committee members brought us a long way. Renewed energy, a change in leadership and approach will craft a final version of the multifaceted solution to our regional wastewater plan.

I, for one, believe it is of paramount importance to our region and people that this case moves forward.