

## **\$13 million pays for 2 EcoComplex facilities**

By Gina Lindsey

The Catawba County staff is acting quickly in hopes of securing \$13.5 million in funding to pay for two facilities in the EcoComplex.

The Board of Commissioners authorized the immediate submittal of applications for a Clean Renewable Energy Bond and a Qualified Energy Conservation Bond, a no-interested or low-interest loan made available through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. The county is seeking \$1.5 million in funding toward its Biodiesel Research and Testing Facility and another \$12 million for the planned Bio-Energy Facility. Both buildings will be located at the county's EcoComplex at the Blackburn Landfill off Rocky Ford Road in Newton.

In order to meet the Tuesday deadline, the applications were completed Monday and mailed overnight. The CREB application for the Bio-Energy Facility was mailed to the Internal Revenue Service while the QECB application for the biodiesel research facility went to the N.C. Department of Commerce.

If Catawba County gets the bonds, they would be the first of their kind allocated in North Carolina, said Catawba County Finance Director Rodney Miller. The QECB would be the first in the nation allocated, said Barry Edwards, Catawba County director of utilities and engineering. "This is just the first decision point," he said. "We don't know if we will receive them."

As the name of the bond implies, qualifying projects must be tied to the generation of renewable energy.

The 5,000-square-foot biodiesel research facility will be used to test biodiesel fuel produced from canola and sunflower crops from around the landfill.

Bidding on the construction of the Biodiesel Research and testing facility begins Tuesday. The \$1.5 million is the anticipated cost of the county's half of the project. The county's partner in the endeavor Appalachian State University is responsible for the other \$1.5 million.

The Bio Energy Facility will involve the gasification of wood waste to produce electricity, said Catawba County Manager Tom Lundy. The scrap wood used in the process will be supplied from companies involved in the EcoComplex, including Gregory Wood Products and PalletOne. The facility will be located across the street from the Blackburn Landfill off Rocky Ford Road. Bidding is expected to open the Bio Energy Facility in December, said Miller.

The county will be notified in about two months whether it received the bonds.

Commissioners also authorized the county to apply for Qualified School Construction Bonds. Catawba County Schools is eligible to receive \$2.39 million for use in the renovation project at Arndt Middle School to build 12 new classrooms and add to the campus from Sulfur Springs Road.

Newton-Conover City Schools could potentially receive \$1.22 million to use toward the construction of a new middle school on County Home Road, which is expected to cost \$21 million to build.