

\$30 Million Sludge Facility Presented

By Gina Lindsey

The Blackburn Landfill on Rocky Ford Road may become home to a new \$30 million sludge facility as the county prepares to replace its existing facility on 20th Avenue SE in Newton, which is expected to be at maximum capacity within three years, county officials said.

The new Wastewater Sludge Management Facility would be a state-of-the art and cost effective facility that would use thermal drying technology to recycle the county's waste, said Barry Edwards, Catawba County Director of Utilities & Engineering.

The new plant would also become part of the county's Eco-Complex and be used to produce methane gas, which will then be converted to green energy that can be sold to power companies. The water and byproducts of the process will also be reused or sold, Edwards said.

Preliminary plans call for the project to begin construction on March 1, 2009, and complete the facility by March 1, 2011, one year after the current sludge plant is due to be at capacity.

The project would be paid for by the Wastewater Sludge Management Facility Consortium, a partnership between Catawba County, Hickory, and Conover, each with part ownership of the Consortium. Catawba County with 18.5 percent ownership, would be responsible for about \$552, 000 if the Catawba County Board of Commissioners approve of the project contract. Hickory, owner of 70.5 percent of the Consortium, and Conover, with 11 percent, would be responsible for the other \$2.4 million.

On Monday, the Policy and Public Works Subcommittee will recommend the Board approve and sign a contract with Camp Dresser and McKee, a national engineering firm from Raleigh, to begin work on the first 30 percent of the final design for the sludge facility at the Blackburn Landfill.

The firm has worked with the Consortium since they were consulted about an odor problem with the existing sludge plant after it was built in 1989, Edwards said.

Odor was also a concern when discussing the new plant.

At Monday morning's subcommittee meeting, Commissioner Kitty Barnes asked how odor would be controlled with the new facility.

The odor would be limited by having an enclosed facility and receiving material in closed tanks, said Richard Tsang, vice president of Camp Dresser and McKee.

Tsang said Cary recently built a similar sludge treatment facility that also uses dry technology. He said its plant has managed the sludge effectively without causing any odor concerns, which he said bodes well for the new Catawba County facility.

The technology will cost more than the Consortium's existing sludge operation which cost \$20 million to build two decades ago, Edwards said. The county had to contribute an additional \$1.5 million to the plant to address the air quality and odor concerns.

Commissioner Dan Hunsucker was worried about the cost and asked if it could be done for less money. Edwards and Tsang responded by saying that yes, it could be done for less; however, the county would not be able to produce the same quality of sludge. Edwards said the

plans would allow the new plant to produce grade-A sludge, which can be sold for landscaping uses. He said they would not be able to produce the same level, or sell the sludge, without the full \$30 million.

According to the contract, the firm would have until April 1, 2008 to submit the first 30 percent of the final design with 60 percent due by June 1, 2008 and 100 percent due by Dec. 1, 2008.