

# THE COUNTY EDGE

## Proposed water policy ripped

MONROE - Union County residents urged the Board of Commissioners to reject a consultant-recommended water allocation policy amid concerns that it favors future development over existing customers.

Fear that allocating water for more new home construction prompted several residents, mostly from western Union County, and business owners to speak at Monday night's (Oct. 6) public hearing about the proposed policy. Residents expressed concerns that the policy would exacerbate a current crisis that could adversely impact the area's quality of life and property values.

"You have to take care of the people who live here first," said Werner Thomisser of Weddington. "It's morally wrong to give the water away to people who don't live here yet.

Consultants have recommended that the county implement a one-day assigned irrigation spread out over a five-day period instead of weekend watering when water use typically spikes above the county's allowed capacity of 20 million gallons daily (mgd). If the county's water capacity continues to dwindle, there could be a ban on all outdoor irrigation.

Residents said the crisis would hurt property values in a number of ways. Some talked about the prospect of not being able to irrigate landscaping investments that add value to their property. Waxhaw's Paul Westlake warned that the crisis would pit water customers against well users and make the area less desirable because of the water restrictions.

"Consultants spent their time trying to appease developers and squeeze more water out of a system that's already overburdened," Westlake said.

He added that the situation appears bleaker than consultants forecasted.

Union County siphons 18 mgd, or 90 percent, of its water supply from the Catawba River via a jointly-owned facility with Lancaster County, S.C. An additional 2 mgd comes from Anson County. Although Union is contracted to draw 4 mgd from Anson, the existing infrastructure does not allow the additional flow. Upgrades are among the county's current efforts to collect more water as well as plan to boost the Anson supply to 6 mgd.

"We're working toward improving infrastructure to carry greater capacity from Anson," said Commissioners' Chairman Allan Baucom.

Marvin's George Hendry pointed out that 43 percent of the county's population resides inside the Catawba River basin with the 57 percent balance living in the Yadkin-Pee Dee basin where only 10 percent of the county's water supply exists. He added that there's between 10,000 and 20,000 platted parcels.

"We really don't have enough water for that," Hendry said.

In addition to negotiations with Anson, Union County officials have been holding regional meetings in hopes of other partnerships with surrounding counties.

Landscapers and nursery owners alike complained that their respective businesses have been ignored in regard to water supply.

"We've been handicapped for over a year," said Steve Ingold, landscaper. "Before you start building new houses, we need to take care of what we have and those of us trying to make a living."

Mark DiBiasio of Wesley Chapel compared the water crisis to the previously encountered sewer woes, adding that the county is heading down the same path. He analogized, "those that don't learn from the past are doomed to repeat it." He further compared the water policy to the controversial "imminent domain."

"Basically, you're taking water away from 37,000 customers and giving it to new customers," DiBiasio said.

Opponents of the water allocation policy reminded the board that state law does hold counties liable for its inability to furnish water or sewer services.

"I am asking the Union County commissioners to build the infrastructure for our county, said Janice Propst, of Weddington. "Build an additional sewer plant and work and work to bring the additional water supply to our county. And then, we can start growing again, but not before."

Commissioners took no action Monday. A formal vote will likely occur at the board's next meeting.