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Landfill study a waste?

York County no closer to solving C&D debate, even after \$90,000 investment

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York County leaders paid a consulting firm nearly \$90,000 to figure out if the county needs more landfills. But the county now has put off making that decision -- possibly for several years -- and one developer believes the money might be wasted.

The company, HDR Engineering, worked with a countywide volunteer group for about a year to develop a plan for managing the county's waste, including how many, if any, landfills are needed.

The committee gave its report to the County Council last month, saying, among other things, that leaders should revisit the need for new construction and debris landfills after four lawsuits and other issues are resolved.

Decision could be years away

The County Council responded by delaying votes on any of the group's suggestions until the lawsuits have been settled, meaning it could be years before leaders decide the issue.

"We took a year and a half to decide that we needed more studies," Councilman Paul Lindemann said during a recent council meeting. "We still haven't gotten the answer. ... Somebody has got to come up and say, 'Yes, we do (need more landfills),' or 'No, we don't.'"

Lindemann and Tom Smith were the only council members opposed to putting off the vote on the committee's recommendations, which included guidelines for landfill recycling.

Councilman Curwood Chappell, who opposes the county getting more landfills, supported the delay.

"For God sakes," Chappell said, "let me leave this council with the dignity I tried to come here with."

The county's plan for managing waste has been controversial for more than a year. The major point of contention has been

construction and demolition landfills, which accept waste from construction sites.

The current plan was adopted in 2007, but it sparked controversy when major changes were made at the last minute. The changes included a projection that York County, one of South Carolina's fastest-growing counties, would need no new construction and demolition landfills until 2013.

The last-minute changes halted plans for two C&D landfills, one on Vernsdale Road in Rock Hill and another on Quarry Road in York. The plan prompted developers of both proposed sites to file lawsuits.

Developer: 'Wasted check'

One of the developers, Greeneagle Co. President Marty Taylor, said that by the time all the lawsuits are settled, the plan might be too old to be applicable. Taylor is developing the Quarry Road landfill.

"It could, in essence, have been a wasted check," he said of the money the county spent on the plan.

Because the Vernsdale project received a permit before the county adopted its 2007 plan, Taylor said, that plan only affects his venture in York.

"Whether they pass a new plan, whether they pass a crazy plan, whether they pass a plan that says all the trucks have to be pink and all the workers wear miniskirts, it doesn't affect Vernsdale," he said. "The only landfill that new plan is affecting is Greeneagle."

Taylor worried County Council members would do what they did last week.

"That was one of my fears ... that the minute we filed lawsuits, the elected officials would have an excuse not to deal with it," he said. "And I think that ended up being the case."

But County Manager Jim Baker said determining the number of landfills the county needs would be too difficult until the lawsuits are settled.

"It wasn't worth fighting about, something that probably wasn't going to make any immediate difference anyway," he said.

Council members followed the committee's suggestions by waiting on the lawsuits to be resolved, Baker said. While leaders

didn't vote on any of the group's other recommendations, he said the committee's report laid the groundwork for future council decisions.

But county leaders knew about some of the legal problems before they hired a consulting firm and selected a committee.

So why spend the money and time?

"It's a legitimate question for people to ask," Baker said. "I guess that's one of those things."

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