



PRESS-REGISTER

Conecuh landfill debate continues

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EVERGREEN -- Four months after Conecuh County commissioners said no to a Florida-based company's plan to build a 5,100-acre landfill near Repton, debate between a citizen's group and the project's proponents continues.

In recent weeks, both sides have aired radio commercials, addressed civic groups and arranged presentations to the County Commission.

Commissioners are scheduled to meet with opponents Monday. They met with developers earlier this month.

"We are becoming more public," said Patrick Slevin, spokesman for Conecuh Woods, the landfill development group.

Slevin also said the project will continue despite the loss of Monroeville Realtor Les Prouty, who died of an apparent stroke April 15. The option to buy the 5,100-acre tract located off Alabama 41 between Range and Repton and bordered by the headwaters of Big Escambia Creek was signed by Prouty and expires May 29.

Slevin said he was not certain how Prouty's death would affect the project.

"There was only one Les Prouty. Many community leaders respected him and supported this project because of him," Slevin said.

Jim McNaughton, a consultant for the Tampa, Fla.-based development group, spoke in a paid radio program on behalf of the proposal last week. He also addressed county commissioners April 11.

The citizen's group opposing the landfill took to the airwaves after the developers broadcast their program. The organization is set to meet with commissioners at 2 p.m. Monday at the County Courthouse in Evergreen.

McNaughton said the Conecuh site was "ideal" for a landfill. He said there would be extensive buffer zones around the 1,500-acre active area, with only an acre or so in use at any given time. He said the proposed dump would take in about 10,000 tons of waste a day by truck and rail.

"When people drive by," McNaughton said, "we want people to think it's a golf course."

Proponents told commissioners in January the landfill could generate up to \$250 million in host fees for the county over about 63 years.

Developers showed a segment of ABC News program 20/20 from 1992 depicting a city-owned and operated landfill in Riverside, Mich., that doubles as a ski slope in winter. The landfill has made millions for the town, according to the city's Web site, and the methane produced fuels a power plant nearby.

Residents against the dump said the Michigan example is misleading since the Conecuh Woods landfill would be privately owned. Also, they said, the example, with its ski slope, suggests no alternate use suitable for southwest Alabama.

Slevin said members of Citizens for a Clean Southwest Alabama have overstated their support in the community. He said the group's meetings were not as well attended as news reports have indicated.

Johnny Andrews, president of the group, said he has sign-in sheets to document the number of people

attending meetings.

Slevin, Andrews said, has released his own inaccurate statements.

At the April 11 meeting with the Conecuh County Commission, Conecuh Woods officers presented aerial photographs of several Florida landfills located near parks or high-end residential developments.

In January, Slevin made a similar point when he told commissioners that he built an upscale new home near Tallahassee and later discovered it was a mile from a landfill.

Andrews said last week that members of Citizens for a Clean Southwest Alabama traveled to Florida and found Slevin's house, and discovered the "landfill" was actually two miles from Slevin's home, and is a waste collection site of a few acres where residents bring trash to be hauled away daily.

Slevin told a Press-Register reporter Wednesday that his January statement about the location of a landfill near his home was based on his misunderstanding of what a neighbor told him.

"It takes me off guard that people have hunted down my private residence," Slevin said. "I made a statement in January in front of the commission that I asked a neighbor when trash was picked up, and he said I had to take it to the dump a mile down the road.

"What was told to you was absolutely correct. I just moved into my new house and drove to the site, and it is two miles down the road," Slevin said. "You can blame semantics of my neighbor but I really don't think that makes this a story.

"It was an honest misunderstanding between neighbors and has never been a main selling point for this landfill," Slevin said.

Andrews disagreed, saying it was just one more example of how the developers have misled people and officials regarding the project.

Developers invited commissioners to tour Florida landfills at Conecuh Woods' expense, and Commission Chairman Wendell Byrd said he was considering the invitation.

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