



Comment period for wastewater permit renewal in Tewksbury is extended

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TEWKSBURY TWP. — The public comment period regarding the renewal of a wastewater discharge permit for property near Route 78 has been extended until April 7.

About 35 people spoke at a public hearing on March 24 at Old Turnpike School which was extended for an hour to accommodate everyone. Except for those representing the company, the speakers were opposed to the renewal. That night originally was supposed to be the end of the comment period.

The permit would allow a sewage treatment facility to be built to serve a proposed 800,000-square-foot office development near Route 78. The permit would allow nearly 100,000 gallons per day of treated wastewater to be discharged into the Rockaway Creek.

The water would be pumped a half mile south of the property to be discharged into the Rockaway Creek. Upstream from that location, the creek is rated as a Category 1 trout production waters. The discharge would enter a section rated as Category 2, enabling the company to discharge a lower-quality effluent. Opponents argued that the stream would be degraded by such effluent and trout and other species of wildlife in the area would be harmed.

The state Department of Environmental Protection revoked the permit but later re-granted it after an appeal.

In 2006 the public strongly supported the permits revocation. This time, many of those same residents and organizations have expressed objections to the renewal of the permit including Citizens to Save Tewksbury, Residents Alliance for Neighborhood Preservation,

Inc., Alliance for Historic Hamlets, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, **New Jersey Highlands Coalition**, New Jersey State Council Trout Unlimited, Sierra Club-New Jersey Chapter, South Branch Watershed Association, and the Upper Raritan Watershed Association.. Neighboring Readington Township is also opposed to the renewal.

The proposed sewer plant would serve a two-building complex proposed by Bellemead Development Corp. that was approved years ago but never built. The approvals lapsed and a plan by K. Hovnanian to build 175 homes on the tract was put forth a few years ago. That development also never came to fruition and the township recently revoked the overlay zoning that allowed the project, which would have included "affordable" housing.

Those opposed to renewing the wastewater permit fear Bellemead will persuade the Township Committee to rezone the area so they can build their project. The area is currently zoned for residential development with minimum 5 acre lots. A renewal would mean the company would not be subject to newer, more stricter environmental rules, including the Highlands Act regulations.

Comments can be mailed to Pilar Patterson, Chief, Mail Code 401-2B, NJDEP Division of Water Quality, Bureau of Surface Water Permitting, Box 420, Trenton NJ 08625-0420 or e-mailed to Pilar.Patterson@dep.state.nj.us.

It may be several months before a decision is made. A DEP representative said there was a large volume of documents received and all are being reviewed.



Map of Tewksbury Township near Route 78. The purple lines define the property owned by Bellemead Development Corp. The red dot is the site of the proposed discharge area of a proposed wastewater treatment plant for which the DEP is considering a permit renewal.