

City Council wants sewer pump station upgrade to occur outside Woolen Mills neighborhood  
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## Woolen Mills

residents are optimistic that a decision made late Monday by Charlottesville's City Council may ultimately move a sewer pump station project from their neighborhood and put it across the Rivanna River in Albemarle County. The

## Rivanna Pump Station

, built in 1981, needs to be upgraded to improve reliability and protect the environment.

At about \$34 million, the sewer project preferred by the council is expected to cost even more than the controversial earthen dam selected for the Ragged Mountain Reservoir as part of the 50-year water supply plan. However, the council made clear this was one regional issue on which they intended to make their preference known early, even before cheaper alternatives received further consideration.

Councilors sided with the neighbors who asked that the pump station not be upgraded at its current location in Woolen Mills and instead be moved as far away from their homes as possible.

"For [the station's first] 20 years, this neighborhood has dealt with a lot of problems, and I think continues to deal with some, whether [the odors] come from manholes or the pumping station itself," Councilor

Kristin Szakos

said. "This is not where we would be putting a pumping station if we were building a new one."

Community members told the council they had been dealing with the sounds and smells of pumping sewage for long enough. Allison Ewing has been a Woolen Mills resident since 2000 and she lives next door to the current pump station.

"We are cautiously optimistic," Ewing said. "Ultimately, it is the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority board that will make the decision as to how to move forward. The city has some seats on that board, but so does the county."

Ewing's spouse, Chris Hays, said he was "very encouraged" that the council had voted to provide clear direction to protect

Riverview Park

and Woolen Mills.

“The great thing is that City Council recognized how important this neighborhood is, as well as the park and access to the river,” Hays said. “In their comments and questions they clearly understood that.”

The Rivanna Pump Station serves parts of the city, Albemarle County and the University of Virginia. It collects raw sewage at the low point in a gravity pipeline system and pumps it uphill to the nearby Moores Creek Waste Water Treatment Plant.

Thomas L. Frederick Jr.

, the RWSA’s executive director, appeared before the council Monday seeking support for funding of continued engineering on at least two of the

four design concepts

for the pump station.

“The need is for additional pumping capacity,” Frederick said. “The method in which it’s done is flexible at this point in time, it is open, and we are looking at various alternatives.”

Frederick said preliminary research had shown the cheapest option was to upgrade the pump station in place at a cost of about \$25 million. That approach, however, would have a high impact on the neighborhood and Riverview Park’s viewshed as a result of a larger above-ground structure.

The council quickly reached consensus to take the current site off the table and opted for what is known as “Concept D,” which would place the new pump station on the opposite shore of the river inside Albemarle County. The site is near land parcels owned by the county and State Farm Insurance, though an exact location has not been specified.

That approach has a preliminary cost estimate of \$34 million, though the RWSA is expected to evaluate a hybrid concept that may keep the existing pump station in service and reduce the price somewhat. Much of the added expense relates to the costs of boring a tunnel through rock underneath the Rivanna River that would house the station’s inflow and outflow piping.

“The city has outlined its preference,” Frederick said in an interview. “As a regional agency serving both the city and county, we are now very interested in the county’s preferences and how we can continue the conversation toward meeting our goals.”

County Supervisor

Kenneth C. Boyd

, a member of the RWSA board, said he was looking for a cost-effective approach that would use new technology to mitigate the sounds and smells Woolen Mills has dealt with in the past.

“[The city’s decision] is not exactly the fiscally conservative approach when it is 36 percent more expensive,” Boyd said in an interview.

Boyd also said the citizen group that advises the county on development issues in Pantops has

expressed concerns about the site in their neighborhood. Residents told Boyd that a preference for the site on their side of the river struck them as a “not in my backyard” argument from the city.

“At the

Pantops Advisory Council

meeting last week, they considered the site to be a NIMBY reaction to the needs of the community,” Boyd said.

Asked if that was a “NIMBY reaction” of its own, Boyd responded, “It’s already in [the city’s] backyard, and that’s the difference.”

The RWSA board is expected to discuss the next steps for the Rivanna Pump Station at its meeting March 22.