

Low turnout for public meeting on South Fork dredging
written by Newspark Team | September 20, 2012

A proposal to dredge portions of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir cleared another hurdle in an evaluation process Thursday as the Rivanna Water & Sewer Authority held a meeting to receive feedback.

However, only three members of the public spoke.

"We don't have a lot of people here tonight," said Thomas L. Frederick Jr. the executive director of the RWSA.

The RWSA Board of Directors has set aside \$3.5 million in its capital improvement budget for dredging the reservoir but opted to leave details of how that would be done to potential bidders.

"We solicited proposals earlier this year under the Public Private Educational Facilities and Infrastructure Act," Frederick said.

Under the act, firms were encouraged to submit creative proposals, rather than follow a specific way to dredge the reservoir.

"During the discussions and deliberations that our board had regarding this particular project, a number of citizens who were in sup-port of dredging expressed concerns that they wanted a more open process," Frederick said.

The basic requirements were that proposals had to remove sediment from three segments of the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir identified in a bathymetric study conducted by the firm HDR in 2010.

Three proposals were received, but only a proposal from Orion Marine Construction was deemed to meet all the qualifications. Un-der their plan, they would collect the full \$3.5 million and would transport dredged material through pipes to nearby Panorama Farm for dewatering.

Orion would be responsible for establishing a dewatering area and for obtaining any required permits from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality.

Albemarle resident Tom Jones, who served on a 2009 task force that explored reasons to dredge the reservoir, said he supported dredging for recreational uses.

"I'm a frequent user of the reservoir," he said. "I'm a rower and a kayaker and get out there a lot."

Jones said the reservoir is getting increasingly shallow as sediment continues to pour in from its almost 260 square-mile watershed. Since the reservoir was completed in 1966, it has lost significant storage capacity each year through sedimentation.

"Places that I could row ... are no longer navigable," Jones said. "They are either a few inches of water or already mud and filled with debris."

City Councilor Dede Smith, who campaigned against the new dam at Ragged Mountain as part of the group Citizens for a Sustainable Water Plan, said the Orion proposal is flawed.

“Why would we spend \$3.5 million to dredge at all, particularly given that in the HDR study it was shown that the sale of the sand ... could bring the cost of the dredging down?” Smith said. “Yet there is nothing in the Orion proposal that uses the marketability of the sand to bring the costs down at all.”

Smith said the RWSA should not to dredge the reservoir for recreational purposes.

“Why would urban ratepayers have to pay for this?” Smith asked. “Those who live on the reservoir, like Mr. Jones, won’t pay for this at all because they’re not on public water.”

Rebecca Quinn, another member of Citizens for a Sustainable Water Plan, said she had supported dredging for water supply purposes, but not for aesthetic ones. She also said the

PPEA was supposed to have been used to promote competition between bidders.

“As a contract officer, I would be horrified at only having one proposal and certainly one with as many weaknesses,” Quinn said. She said she is concerned that Orion only listed one disposal site and that the firm generally dredges in marine environments that require noisy equipment.

Quinn also said that the four-party agreement that governs the affairs of the RWSA prevents dredging purely for aesthetic purposes.

“[RWSA] will undertake to maintain all dams and other facilities at such reservoirs for the production of water, but will not be re-quired to maintain areas at such reservoirs used for municipal purposes,” reads page five of the agreement, which was signed by the city and county in 1973.

Public comments will be taken through the RWSA website through Monday. After that, the evaluation committee will meet to begin reviewing the proposal, Frederick said.

Frederick said the evaluation committee would report back to the RWSA board in the fall. They can recommend immediately pro-ceeding with contract negotiations, asking for a more detailed proposal or not accepting it at all.