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ReVenture may land \$197 million wastewater plant

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities targets site in proposed business park

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[Charlotte-Mecklenburg Utilities](#) is pushing a deal with Mount Holly for a new treatment plant — the first to be built by the city in more than 30 years — that could help anchor a renewable-energy business park.

If approved, the water and sewer department would design, build and own the estimated \$197 million plant at Long Creek that would be at the south end of the proposed ReVenture “eco-park.”

The property is just north of the U.S. National Whitewater Center, at a contaminated Superfund site owned by [Clariant Corp.](#)

“This is probably Charlotte’s last opportunity for a treatment plant at this location,” interim utilities director Barry Gullet says, adding that the city has looked at the site for four decades. He says the plant can be built with odor controls, similar to devices that have been retrofitted to the city’s older sewage treatment facilities.

Utilities officials are negotiating terms of the deal. Mount Holly would send its sewage to Charlotte by way of a pipe that would be built through bedrock underneath the Catawba River. The town would pay for the pipe, the cost of sewage treatment and capital expenses for future expansion.

At first, the plant would have enough capacity to process 6 million gallons of sewage per day for Charlotte and 6 million gallons per day for Mount Holly.

Both the utilities department and Mount Holly need the plant to accommodate growth. In February, Charlotte’s McAlpine plant hit 94% of its treatment capacity.

Sewage from the northwest section of the city is collected and pumped by way of a 27-mile network of pipes and pump stations to the McAlpine wastewater treatment plant near the state line.

The Charlotte water and sewer department is looking to aggressively expedite construction of the new plant, with a target completion date of 2013.

But the facility isn’t included in the department’s current budget. If it is made a priority, it may bump back or replace other long-term projects in the works: \$40 million in renovations of the Irwin Creek wastewater treatment plant, a \$123 million expansion of the Sugar Creek wastewater treatment plant and \$32 million in renovations to the McAlpine plant.

Sewer rates would have to be raised to pay for the capital expense, but how much is not clear at this point.

If plans for the Long Creek plant move forward, that would give the developers of ReVenture a second anchor to their industrial park. The developers want to sell the land — at an undisclosed price — or privately develop a treatment plant.

“Everything is on the table to be discussed,” utilities spokesman Vic Simpson says. “But we have to be mindful of our obligations to wastewater customers.”

Meanwhile, ReVenture developer Tom McKittrick says his team is close to delisting the 667-acre property as a federal Superfund site and enrolling the property in the state’s brownfield program.

Forsite Development Inc. — a partnership between McKittrick and The Springs Co. of Lancaster — says it close to securing as many as 15 companies and developments for the park.

“We are trying to create an energy hub,” McKittrick says.

The main anchor would be a \$300 million, 49-megawatt biomass power plant that would generate energy by incinerating trash, wood and sewage sludge.

“This is not an incinerator,” McKittrick stressed in a presentation to City Council on Monday. “This is designed to create energy.”

Forsite hopes it can get that sludge for its proposed power plant. The company also is eyeing Mecklenburg County’s solid waste as a fuel source.

Other components to the park include:

- 300,000 square feet of office space for small businesses in the energy and environmental industries.
- A 4-megawatt photovoltaic solar field planned across a closed 25-acre landfill.
- A 15.5-acre parcel that could house environmental nonprofits and startups.
- An alternative-fueling station on 3 acres to offer natural gas and biodiesel.
- 120 acres set aside for conservation that would connect to the Carolina Thread Trail and the whitewater center.

Forsite says it should have agreements for \$70 million to \$90 million in equity funding for its proposed biomass power plant along the Catawba River by late May.

The developers hope to obtain permits quickly so they can start construction of the plant before year end. That would qualify the plant for up to \$40 million in tax credits.

Forsite also must secure an air-quality permit from Mecklenburg County by early December to make that goal.

And then there’s the rest of the money required to make the renewable-energy park a reality. As planned, ReVenture’s total investment could top \$922 million and bring 1,034 permanent jobs. About 800 temporary construction jobs could be created to build out the park.

Those are rough numbers. For example, Forsite’s figures for the wastewater treatment plant pegs the facility at \$250 million, while the utilities department is estimating the project at \$197 million.

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