STOP THE DUMP

On 09/07/09 Tom Mims filed paperwork that could convert southern Polk County into a private dump. Mims who owns 9,000+ acres in Polk County started with a land use request to change 325+ acres north of Bradley Junction and west of Hwy 37 to industrial use and followed that with a request to site a 1,700 acre landfill north of Bradley Junction on the west side of state road 37. That this site is less than ½ mile from the families and homes of Oak Terrace, ¾ mile from the families and homes of Rolling Hills, 1 mile from the families and homes of Pinedale and ¾ mile from the families and homes of Bradley Junction seems of little concern.

Polk County currently has enough waste disposal capability to meet its needs for 65 years. So the question has to be why open another dump in Polk County, a privately owned one at that? The only answer that makes sense is that the site will target out of county garbage from all of west central Florida. That’s where another request made in June for a 325+ acre Land use change from PM to industrial compliments the dump. This area is on the east side of Hwy 37 and much of it is less than ½ mile from the dump and includes CSX staging tracks. So it seems logical that these yards are not to ship goods out of the area they are desired to stage railcars full of garbage from other locations in central Florida, which could be as far away as Cape Coral, Orlando, Tampa, St Pete and Clearwater, which would then be disposed of in the landfill. It is hard to believe any ecologically friendly company is going to locate its facilities less than a mile from a dump. So just what kind of business will locate on this property?

Is there any advantage to being the garbage pit of central Florida? I can think of no advantages only disadvantages. The first to suffer will be the property values of the nearby communities; this pit will be so close there could be a drop in value for over 500 individual homes in addition to making the whole area unattractive for additional growth. Who wants to live near a 220 ft mound of garbage? There will be quality of life issues in the affected communities that include offensive odors, vermin, surface and groundwater contamination, plant species invasion, and unwanted noise. There is very little in this request that will benefit Polk County, it will in the long and short run cost every taxpayer money in increased taxes to support a private enterprise. It is conceivable this facility could compete with the county for contracts with local waste haulers to underbid disposal costs. The county run facilities contribute an average of 8 million dollars to the county budget each year, a cost that would have to be passed to other taxpayers i.e. you.

On Sept 28 I attended a County Commission/Planning workgroup meeting. In the meeting (available on the Polk County web site) there was a lot of discussion about making sure developers include planning that promotes a sense of community and addresses the preservation/restoration of natural resources that will be the cornerstone of future development within the county. These policies will be put in place under the name PolkGreen, which does not appear to include additional landfill operations in the county. In addition to this meeting Polk County has a study that addresses the Bone Valley area of Polk County. This area is 170,000+ acres of land south of Hwy 60, East of Hwy 17 south and east to the county lines of Hardee and Hillsboro counties. Any approval of the landfill request at this time defeats the purpose of the study.

I urge everyone to read the Sept 9 proposal very carefully. Under the guise of Innovation it makes some grandiose claims about what it will be able to do with the waste it will collect (that no one else is doing this makes it suspect). The proposal mentions employment of 250 people with 100 employees working on the landfill waste products (i.e. dumping it in the ground). The county-run facility handles far more waste than what is initially projected with a workforce of less than 10 people per day making the employment figures suspect too. The author of this document was very skilled at the use of catch phrases and words to make a sow’s ear sound like a silk purse. Read it carefully, if it sounds too good to be true, it is. Be informed. No one in Polk County should be fooled; this facility is aimed at bringing in waste from other counties that they do not want to dispose of in their own sites. Why should our County Commissioners allow a private enterprise to construct a garbage dump in Polk County to dispose of garbage from other counties?

In addition to this action Mr. Mims had previously proposed a land use change for 350 acres across hwy 37 from the dump site that includes a rail staging yard. His initial pitch for this change was it would attract firms that needed access to rail shipping. He also stated the area was heavily industrialized (which it is not). On its face this seemed a strange request in light of the current economic conditions, but the rail access “sold” the project. That the project did not compliment/address most planning guidelines did not phase the County Commission: they were for it. He was repeatedly asked if CSX was aware of his plans and always gave assurances they were. In the Bone Valley SAS meeting a week later CSX outlined its rail commitments for the future and indicated that all its tracks and sidings were committed in contracts with the phosphate industry for many years in the future. These commitments tie up these yards and preclude adding capacity to support additional industry needs in the area.

Every citizen of Polk county needs to understand, you WILL be affected by this proposal and it will start with your wallet and could end with an ecological disaster that could bankrupt the county. There is nothing to prevent the company from just walking away from whatever harm they do by declaring bankruptcy. Look at the history of mining companies, it wasn’t until the government stepped in and forced accountability that cleanup action was assured. Even now there are thousands of incidents where the taxpayer has been forced to fund the cleanup.

We have formed a Stop the Dump movement to give the citizens of Polk County a forum to express their objection to this project. Petitions will be available for signatures but the best way to express your concern is to call your county commissioner and get on record directly with him/her that you do not see need for a private landfill in this county that brings in waste from another county and request they not vote to approve either of the above projects. Your phone call will make a difference.

Thank you.

Committee To Stop The Dump.