

A Failure of Duty

When government ignores the health and welfare of citizens.

At its meeting on December 8th, 2011, the Northumberland County Board of Supervisors voted 4-1 to approve a special exceptions permit for the proposed Bluff Point PUD and specified Conditions required of the developer. Among these Conditions is a requirement intended to address the impact of groundwater withdrawals by the PUD. Unfortunately, the Condition is so poorly crafted--making neither scientific nor administrative sense--that it provides no protection to the wells and water supplies of households and communities in the vicinity of the PUD.

Whereas the Condition requires aquifer testing in order to determine the hydrologic effects of pumping by the PUD, its purpose is to, and I quote, "demonstrate to the County that the hydrogeologic conditions will provide an adequate water supply for the Bluff Point PUD." Why the County Supervisors should be in the business of securing a water supply for a private enterprise rather than protecting the public supply for all citizens of the County is something they should have to explain.

Moreover, the Condition states that if aquifer tests determine that groundwater withdrawals by the PUD will cause "impacts to existing wells," then "the County Board of Supervisors will hold a public meeting to reconsider the water withdrawal and any mitigation proposed." Putting aside any thoughts of harm to future wells, the image of the BOS attempting to redress damage to the groundwater supply or compensate homeowners for damage to their wells and pumps simply by holding a public meeting brings me little comfort.

Despite a bushelful of technical jargon, this Condition is powerless to safeguard the water supply of County residents and represents a gross failure of public duty.

Frank Fletcher

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