

'Until it's dead, it's not dead'

Some in Odenton concerned that proposed landfill still possible

By Mark R. Smith,
Senior Writer

When driving by, the spot on the north side of Conway Road near the power lines by the Two Rivers section of Odenton hardly looks like the planned entrance for the new West County Elementary School.

It's inconspicuous, perhaps more so than the old, rusty gate on nearby Patuxent Road, just outside the historic village of Woodwardville. At the gate, there's a sign for a proposed rubble landfill that the Silver Spring-based Halle Cos. has planned for the south side of Odenton for about 40 years.

Local resident Cathy Fleshman has fought to keep the nearly 200-acre landfill from opening for most of her life. The buzz on the street is that the building of the elementary school would preclude the opening of the landfill. And that may be. But she's not so sure.

"[County Executive Stuart] Pittman sent a letter out that generally said that was the case, but it puts me on edge because many residents of Two Rivers think that the landfill debacle is over. But not so fast," said Fleshman. "Part of the landfill approach will be taken up by the new elementary school, but Halle still has one legal entry.

"We've been dealing with (Warren E. "Cookie") Halle for 40 years and they're looking at ways to make this work," she said, "I don't put anything past the company."

Halle Vice President Steve Fleischman did not respond to requests for comment for this article.

Not Dead Yet

Ulis Fleming is a longtime Woodwardville resident whose property abuts what could become part of



Though not an official entry point for the proposed Halle landfill, this spot on Patuxent Road in Woodwardville has been a reminder of the possibility of the project becoming a reality for many a year.

the landfill. Like Fleshman, he's very concerned.

The project would be "a life-changing event for the locals concerning the quality of life, health concerns, environmental concerns, property values and the fact that this area is in a flood plain," he said.

"It's like Frankenstein's monster. Until it's dead, it's not dead," he said. "It's frustrating that it's been going on so long and I don't think the area's more recent residents understand how the landfill would impact them."

Andrew Pruski, County Councilman for District 4, is another opponent of

the project. "I've been against the landfill for 20 years, from my days with the Four Seasons Community Association to my position with the council, and it just does not comport with that area given its residential development in recent years.

"Few residents want a landfill in their neighborhoods, especially after the Base Realignment and Closure that was completed several years ago and the expansion at Fort Meade," said Pruski, since it would create "the additional truck traffic that would come with an industrial project in what has become a residential area."

Those developments have changed the

attitude of many observers since the project was proposed about four decades ago," he said. "It's not just residents of Piney Orchard who are complaining. Since people started moving into Two Rivers, I've gotten many calls from concerned residents who don't want it."

'An Abomination'

As for the school, the Anne Arundel County Council has purchased the land, approved the deal and in November transferred the property to the Board of Education. The start of construction will remove the planned key access point for the landfill.

However, Halle can apply for another exception and go through the courts in hopes of creating another access point and possibly still get the project done.

But at any size or entry point the landfill "is totally inappropriate," said Marsha Perry, a former state delegate and long-time community activist. "The ill-formed idea of even entertaining the thought of plopping down a landfill in the middle of Woodwardville; Wilson Town (a historic African American community); Conway Road and South Odenton next to one of the state of Maryland's legally designated, and thus protected, scenic rivers (the Patuxent), is an abomination."

Deal Not Done

Fleming and Fleshman are concerned that if Pittman eventually leaves office, the next county executive might be pro-landfill and pro-development.

That's why the locals need to stay on top of the issue, Fleshman said. "The Forks of the Patuxent Improvement Association has had a fund for legal fees for 40 years, but Two Rivers doesn't and they need representation.

"I fear they think it's a done deal," she said, "but it's not."