

# Commissioners OK asphalt plant on Liberty Road

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The Guilford County Commissioners have rejected an appeal by neighbors to stop Sharpe Bros. from building an asphalt plant on Liberty Road, paving the way for construction to begin at the controversial site.

Almost 300 people showed up at the August 23 meeting to show support either for the asphalt plant or for neighbors who fear it will be a blight on the landscape. Leading the opposition were residents of Lynwood Lakes, who live within walking distance of the site.

First on the commissioners' agenda was an appeal filed by those opposing the county planning board's decision to rezone the area around 3905 Old Liberty Road as "heavy industrial."

Henry Isaacson, attorney for Sharpe Bros., began the hearing by pointing out concessions that the asphalt company had made in its plans to appease neighbors, including adding left and right turn lanes to Liberty Road, erecting a 12-foot-high noise wall along 220 feet of frontage property, and limiting truck access to Old Liberty Road from the subject property except in cases of emergency. Isaacson had outlined the same conditions in his presentation to the planning board in May. He also reminded the commissioners that an asphalt plant used to sit near the site until 1995.

Isaacson quoted a Davenport Engineering employee as saying, "What stands out to me is the almost total absence of residential zoning near the subject property."

In rebuttal, attorney for the opponents, Don Vaughan of Greensboro, said although proponents had enlisted traffic engineers, real estate agents and other professionals to tout the safety of such a plant, their arguments were missing a crucial element: quality of life.

"They just know this is going to affect their quality of life," Vaughan told commissioners.

Bill Brannon, a key leader of opponents in the past year, said, "Our area is fundamentally residential, and right now, it's a darn good place to live. Bringing in more heavy industrial development would change that in many ways." Bill ended his appeal with a heartfelt plea to commissioners: "We showed up by the hundreds at the planning board meeting. We don't feel we've gotten any protection from the planning board. You are our real and only hope. We put our trust in you at the polls. Now, please protect us."

After hearing from both sides, Chairman Paul Gibson called for a 10-minute recess. During the break, the crowd chatted nervously, trying to assess how the

commissioners would vote.

After returning from break, the board began an hour-long discussion, asking specific questions from representatives of both sides. The commissioners' allegiances started becoming clearer. Billy Yow said he couldn't see anything better suited for the area. Carolyn Coleman raised concerns about traffic and health hazards. Linda Shaw, questioning the plant's suitability for the area, sparred with Yow: "I think you're going to have a put a muzzle on Billy if he keeps interrupting us," she told the chairman. Amid the debate, different commissioners asked proponents and opponents to stand several times, each phrasing their question different ways:

"Stand up if you work for Sharpe Bros." "Stand up if you don't work for Sharpe Bros. but are opposed." "Stand up if you live within one mile of the area." "Stand up if you live within three miles of the area."

After Sharpe Bros. made a point about workers' livelihoods being affected, Carolyn Coleman asked audience members to "Stand up if you will lose your job if this doesn't pass." No one stood.

Commissioner Bruce Davis got in the final word before the vote, arguing that, because of the Martin Marietta Rock Quarry, which is the primary source for making asphalt, more trucks will be traveling on Liberty Road regardless of where the plant is located. If it were 10 miles elsewhere, trucks would still have to visit the quarry on Liberty to get raw materials, he said. The commissioners voted 11-2 to reject the rezoning appeal, with Coleman and Shaw dissenting.

Next came an appeal hearing on the special-use permit granted by the planning board in May to allow Sharpe Bros. to actually build the plant. The Commissioners rejected that appeal also, 11-3, with Kirk Perkins joining Shaw and Coleman's dissenting votes.