

Proposed storage facility evokes safety concerns

My friend had never seen a dead body. He avoided eye contact when he described the gruesome aftermath of a head-on fatal crash in 2020 near 547 Crab Creek Road -- just the latest to claim a life on that stretch of rural road. Yet, a new proposed development almost ensures more accidents.

That's where developer Matthew Cooke wants to build a 1,000-unit storage facility - a planned 125,758 square-foot project that would be the size of a Super Target.

Hundreds of local residents formed Preserve Crab Creek (www.preservecrabcreek.org) to fight this project because it puts their community at risk:

h A traffic influx making the road more dangerous and likely delaying emergency response to local residents.

h Fire danger, from possible hazardous or flammable materials stored at the facility.

h Crime common at these facilities.

As a firefighter for almost two decades, I've responded to hundreds of wrecks. I believe the inherent risk to the thousands of drivers on Crab Creek Road should immediately disqualify this massive development.

Research by veteran traffic engineer Rick Hall, Professional Engineer, backs me up. The proposed location of the new entrance is on a blind hill, where the posted speed limit is 45 mph. He clocked a number of vehicles driving at excessive speeds, one at 78 mph, during his study for Preserve Crab Creek.

Cooke claimed, "[The facility] won't affect traffic." Wrong.

Using methodology employed by traffic engineers nationwide, Hall found Cooke's proposed facility will generate 190 additional trips daily. Drivers entering the facility will be operating larger trucks -- they'll have to swing wide and awkwardly block traffic when entering the facility, with possible catastrophic consequences as drivers are forced to slam on their brakes on a blind hill.

This affects not only area residents, but hundreds of drivers going out to Holmes and Dupont Forests or taking this route to Brevard. It should alarm everyone in the county.

Most importantly, it threatens to affect first responders trying reach people in distress.

Crab Creek Road is the only artery for Valley Hill Fire Department to get to citizens north of this proposed intersection and the only route EMS can take south to the county line. There are no alternate routes to reach people calling 911.

Delayed response matters. Fire doubles in size every 30 seconds in typical conditions. If firefighters have to wait two minutes for an inexperienced driver to navigate a turn, a fire will quadruple in size in that lost time.

Seconds matter equally in medical emergencies -- for every minute trained professionals aren't performing CPR, survival from ventricular fibrillation cardiac arrest decreases by 7 to 10%.

You can help.

Call the County Commissioners at 828-697-4808. Tell them:

h We trust them to do the right thing for the greater good of County residents, not cater to one developer with a dangerous plan.

h We want smart growth - urge them to follow their own Comprehensive Land Use Planning process.

h We won't tolerate developers harming County citizens who have equal rights to "do what they want with their property" -- enjoy it as they intended when they bought it.

h We have a right to live safely - County officials have a duty to make this their highest priority.

This unwanted, unneeded, potentially dangerous project has no place in Crab Creek.

Angie Bell is a resident of Hendersonville



Your Turn

Angie Bell Guest columnist

Hall demonstrated the stretch of road is one of the most dangerous in the region before the insertion of a new, poorly placed development. Hall explained Crab Creek Road is considered an “antique” route, not designed to handle modern cars. It sees six times the crashes per-miles-traveled as 64 West, and 12 times as many as I-26.

He testified at the Zoning Board hearing, “Placing this kind of facility on the most dangerous road in the region is not a good idea.”

Fire/EMS waiting one minute behind drivers jamming traffic to turn into Cooke’s facility will happen, and is absolutely unacceptable. Lives will be at risk, and why? An unwelcome, unnecessary storage facility -- the 55th within a 20-mile radius.

The proposed facility is also a fire hazard just waiting to be ignited. Fires happen frequently in these units. In June, stored fireworks went kaboom in a Colorado facility. Suspected arson caused another in Sacramento in July. People think metal buildings won’t burn, but the fire load inside absolutely will.

If we get another dry year like 2016 (remember the Lake Lure fires?), one floating ember from Cooke’s storage facility could ignite this rural area, putting homes, and possibly lives, at risk.