

Environmentalists join forces to oppose Cliffs

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BY CHARLES SOWELL
staff writer

A largely hostile crowd ripped developer Jim Anthony's plans for the Cliffs at Mountain Park golf course during a public meeting Monday night at North Greenville University.

The state Department of Health and Environmental Control and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers also came in for some rapid-fire criticism from residents of northern Greenville County.

After the meeting, a coalition of environmental groups - Save Our Saluda, Upstate Forever, the Sierra Club, the South Carolina Native Plant Society and American Whitewater - held a press conference to oppose plans for the golf course along the North Saluda River.

Save Our Saluda (SOS) has gathered more than 11,000 signatures on petitions opposing the golf course. The other environmental groups were no less vocal in their opposition to plans to weave a golf course around two miles of river.

Dianne Anastos of SOS said she and other environmental groups were hugely disappointed in the way state agency representatives presented their case at North Greenville.

"The meeting just served to illustrate how dysfunctional our regulatory agencies have become," she said. "The Cliffs seem able to do pretty much as they please along the river. No one seems willing to look at the total impact of this development on the environment and the people who have lived in the area for

generations."

Brad Wyche, executive director of Upstate Forever, wasn't quite as hard on the state and federal regulatory agencies.

"They are limited, by law, in what they can do. If certain technical criteria are met, then they must issue the permits. What's needed in the upper end of the county, and elsewhere, is land-use laws (zoning)"

He said the county has the authority to regulate the development.

"It is an authority they have not taken on," he said.



Charles Sowell/Staff
COALITION SPEAKS: Dianne Anastos, of Save Our Saluda, speaks during Monday night's press conference.

> Wyche said holes in the laws don't release DHEC and the Corps from enforcing existing water-use laws, however.

Anthony's refusal to sign an agreement with Upstate Forever on plans for the river prompted the environmental group to go on record as opposing the Cliffs' state permit for what the golf course will do to the river.

Addressing that issue Monday night, Cliffs Vice President Don Nickell said Anthony isn't required to sign an agreement with anyone other than the state and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. Those agencies will oversee the developer's actions along the river once permits are issued.

The Corps will issue a federal permit after the state approves its permit, said Colt Bowles, a Corps representative.

It would be a coalition of agencies, DHEC, the Corps and Greenville County that monitor compliance on issues such as the buffer zone around the river in the eventuality that DHEC issues a 401 certification, said Adam Myrick, a DHEC spokesman.

U.S. Rep. Bob Inglis, who became involved in the controversy as both the 4th District Representative and as a resident who lives along the North Saluda, confirmed there would be a trio of regulatory agencies monitoring the river and regulating what goes on there if the golf course wins approval.

Nickell and Heather Preston, director of DHEC's water quality division, said work done by the Cliffs along the river now is covered by grading permits issued by Greenville County.

Judy Wortkutter, director of the Greenville County Land Development department, said no monitoring is done by the county inside the river's riparian zone beyond making sure runoff requirements are met.

There is no monitoring of trees cut or other changes in the riparian zone. As nearly as state and local officials could determine, no monitoring beyond basic runoff requirements will be done inside the riparian buffer zone until the state permit is issued.

Environmental groups took great issue with plans for buffer zones along the river at Monday's meeting. Wyche said work in stream floodplains was a big part of the recently passed Greenville County Tree Ordinance, which does not regulate the Cliffs project because it was started before the law was passed.

Contact Charles Sowell at 679-1208
or csowell@greenvillejournal.com.