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Source of Brunswick's odor still undetermined

By Pamela Permar-Shierling

City commissioners were not happy last Wednesday with the report from the Georgia Dept. of Natural Resources' (DNR) Environmental Protection Division (EPD) concerning the odors permeating Brunswick during the past year.

The complaint period was from December 2020 through November 2021.

Beth Stevenson, EPD Coast District Manager, told the commission during a December 1 work session that EPD had been unable to determine the source of the odors citizens have complained about for the past year.

Stevenson said that each complaint had been tracked and included in a data base.

"We have driven routes through the areas where we thought the odors were coming from," Stevenson said, "and through the results of a modeling effort we believe the source is within a one mile buffer zone that includes the Academy Creek wastewater treatment plant and Georgia Pacific."

She said EPD's current priority was to close the current complaint file which then makes all the information available to the public and open a new complaint file.

Mayor Cornell Harvey said to Stevenson, "You said a lot of words but we need to

know where the smells are coming from."

Stevenson responded, "It's hard to say where the odors are coming from. The description of the complaints vary."

"The source is likely within the one mile buffer zone that includes Georgia Pacific and Academy Creek," she said again.

Mayor Harvey asked if the pieces of the Golden Ray that sit in the Brunswick River while they are dismantled are causing the odor.

Stevenson said the Golden Ray was not included in the modeling but EPD did drive the routes relating to the smells including the dock, and the smell from the dock were not consistent with the odor descriptions in the complaints.

"Pinova and Georgia Pacific have been here in Brunswick for years," Mayor Harvey said. "This smell seemed to creep up on us. Maybe it's from the cars under the water."

Com. Julie Martin asked, "Have you determined that the smell is definitely coming from Academy Creek?"

Stevenson said, "We don't experience the same thing (as the smell from Academy Creek) when we respond to a complaint."

"Most of the complaints come from the Prince St., Union St., and First Avenue areas," she said.

Com. Felicia Harris said, "You haven't told us much and there is no resolution. The residents need to know we are trying to find a resolution but we don't know anything. There is no resolution in your report."

Stevenson said, "We will continue to take complaints and get the information into the right hands. If a facility is involved, we will do an inspection."

Mayor Harvey wanted to know how long it would take to run down any issues, but Stevenson did not know.

Com. Harris asked if the EPD had any specifics as to the perpetrators. Then she asked if EPD had spoken one on one with anyone in their home.

"Odors can remain in fabrics and furnishings," Com. Harris said. "Have you gone to anyone's home and spoken with them about this?"

Stevenson said talking one on one with the complainant had been discussed. "There are about six people we want to talk to one on one."

Com. Martin said, "I feel like this meeting is just to placate the commission. These odors are caustic. People can't sleep, their eyes water, they cough. These (odor) issues need to be addressed effectively."

Ms. Martin continued, "Just because everyone is not experiencing these symptoms doesn't mean it isn't happening. We need an urgency to the solution."

City Manager Regina McDuffie said, "Our whole community is affected by these smells. People moving here are asking me about it. These odors impact the city's growth. You should be able to find the smell."

"We don't want a report that says

nothing," Com. Harris said.

"We want a resolution," Com. Vincent Williams said.

Stevenson said, "The odor is difficult to mitigate until we find the source. We are still investigating it. But until we find the source (of the odor), we can't define a solution."

Stevenson also suggested that if anyone is suffering ill health effects from the odor, they should consult their doctor.

Karen Hays, Branch Chief of the DNR's Air Protection Branch, said that an entity could be in full compliance with their air quality permit and still be emitting an odor. "We want to be certain that we identify the right odor."

Com. Harris said, "That is a problem if there is an odor and the air quality permit is still being met. I can understand you not wanting to name the entity."

Sharon Ehle, Treasurer of the Glynn Environmental Coalition (GEC), was given permission to speak.

She said, "You are dancing around the issue. Our (GEC) data pinpoints Georgia Pacific. They know it and we know it. What are you going to do to bring them (Ga. Pacific) to the table?"

Rachael Thompson, GEC Executive Director, said she had invited Ga. Pacific to participate in the city's work session. Thompson said the company would be able to participate at a later date.

Once the current case is closed, the public will be able to see all the data on line including all the complaints, the driving routes, observations, what was done to determine the source of the odor, and the modeling presentation.

To make a complaint about an odor call 912-264-7284.