



Mayor wants germ lab meeting

BY WILLIAM F. WEST, The Herald-Sun
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CREEDMOOR -- Creedmoor Mayor Darryl Moss, the lone local elected leader holding off supporting a proposed germ-fighting lab here, says he'd like to see a community meeting on the issue.

Moss believes there haven't been enough details circulated about the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility, which could be built in nearby Butner.

Creedmoor's City Commission recently passed a resolution calling on the Granville County Commission to "ensure maximum citizen participation" in future discussions about the county's position on the matter.

The county is on record favoring Butner as the home of the \$450 million lab. Project supporters have cited the locale's proximity to the brainpower of the Research Triangle Park as one of the major reasons why.

Other supporters have said that the Tar Heel state could gain more than \$1.6 billion in new revenue over the first two decades of the facility's projected half-century lifespan.

But Moss, at a September federal public hearing in Creedmoor, told an audience of hundreds that he couldn't, "in good conscience," support the initiative, at least for now. His remarks drew applause and cheers from many in the crowd.

Of Creedmoor's resolution, Moss said, "We're taking the stance that -- at the public hearing -- we had a lot of people, neighbors that stood up and said either they hadn't heard anything about it, or they wanted more information."

The resolution also calls on the county commissioners to ensure a rigorous environmental impact study.

Commission Chairman Ron Alligood said he hasn't seen Creedmoor's resolution -- dated Oct. 10 -- and doesn't know exactly what to make of it. Alligood declined comment on Moss' position.

"But the bottom line is the county is going to certainly encourage a strong impact study on it," Alligood said. "That goes without saying. And if there's anything out there we need to know, we expect to know about it."

At the same time, Alligood said, "We're not guaranteed that thing is going to be here anyhow. We're still one in five."

Alligood was referring to the four other site finalists for the lab: San Antonio, Texas; Athens, Ga.; Manhattan, Kan.; and a town near Jackson, Miss.

The federal government is scheduled to make a final decision by October 2008, with the lab to begin operations by 2014.

The facility will replace an aging, smaller one at Plum Island, N.Y., where security lapses after the 2001 terrorist attacks drew scrutiny from Congress and government investigators. A federal official did note Plum Island remained an alternative site, after its existing facility is decommissioned.

A North Carolina consortium of private and public experts is working to secure the project for Butner.

One of the group's key leaders is Barrett Slenning, who teaches at N.C. State University's College of Veterinary Medicine.

Slenning said one of the misunderstandings about the September federal meeting was the belief that the session was supposed to be educational. The plan was the other way around, he said.

"The federal government wanted information from the public as far as what issues should be addressed" in the impact study, he said.

A draft of the study is anticipated to be ready by the spring, he said. The contents, he said, not only will detail the impact on the air, land and water, but will also look at the effect on the number of people in the area and the economy.

Slenning said he would be open to a local meeting. The consortium also has made at least three unsuccessful overtures to the Granville Non-Violent Action Team (GNAT) for a meeting, he said. GNAT is mobilizing against attempts to locate the facility at Butner.

Elaine McNeill of Stem, a GNAT member, said while she's not privy to any details of offers to meet with the consortium, she's against meeting with the group because she believes they've made up their minds.

And McNeill said she believes the September meeting was one of federal, state and local officials "genuflecting" to the Department of Homeland Security and praising the facility.

"But the thing that galled me most was they kept mentioning 'community,' 'community,' 'community,'" when affected residents were not included, McNeill argued.

"The community they were talking about was the consortium, the business and academic people who would stand to benefit from this," she argued.

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