

Orange Co. should pass on allowing Texas-sized gas station

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Orange County proclaims itself to be "Around the corner, ahead of the curve." We are home to the Tar Heels, renowned medical facilities, award-winning public schools, talented authors, thoughtful development, and if approved, the first Buc-ee's Travel Center in North Carolina.

Described by Architect Magazine as "a gas station on steroids," Buc-ee's was developed for the wide-open spaces of Texas. Buc-ee's has applied to the Orange County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) to build one of the world's largest gas stations on a protected watershed in the small unincorporated town of Efland.

Buc-ee's wants to capture gasoline and retail sales from the 125,000 cars that pass by Efland daily. In Phase 1 of construction, they will build a monstrous 24/7 gas station. Phase 2 is a conceptual site plan proposing (but not promising) a hodge-podge of other structures without meaningful pedestrian circulation patterns, natural recreational sites or usable green space, or enhanced rail use.

The Eno River Association, the **Center for Biological Diversity**, the Orange County Soil and Water Board, and many other environmental organizations have written the Orange County BOCC in strong opposition of Buc-ee's proposal. Among a litany of environmental concerns, they take issue with the drinking water of Hillsborough residents being put at risk. Buc-ee's plans to install six tanks containing 240,000 gallons of gasoline into a fractured shale and bedrock field on a protected watershed that adjoins the Upper Eno Critical Watershed. To date, there has been no third party environmental impact assessment completed.

If approved, Buc-ee's would permanently close the I-85/40 westbound exit 160, which is used by nearly all Efland residents. It would add over 25,000 new daily car trips to Efland. Buc-ee's would also drastically change the traffic pattern to Ben Johnston Road and the I-85 / Hwy 70 Connector, which local trucks and school buses regularly use between Hillsborough and Efland.

The majority of downtown and western Hillsborough businesses have signed letters to the BOCC opposing Buc-ee's because of the traffic chaos that would ensue.

Under the current zoning on this site, Buc-ee's giant travel center would not be allowed. This is why Buc-ee's is requesting that Orange County change the zoning to create a 104-acre development district named Efland Station.

A Voice for Efland and Orange is a group of concerned community members with the support of thousands. We are not opposed to thoughtful development that would bring good jobs and economic prosperity to our community. The land that Buc-ee's wants to build on is already zoned for development uses based on community input from the Efland-Mebane Small Area Plan. The Orange County BOCC has adopted a resolution to transition to a 100% renewable energy-based economy by 2050. Our community has the opportunity to be on the leading edge of economic development in NC. So why are we trying to change decades of planning and community decisions to allow a massive 120-nozzle gas station to be built on a protected watershed at the height of the climate crisis?

Buc-ee's is known for putting massive billboards with their trademarked beaver 200 miles in either direction of their locations. If the Orange County BOCC approves their rezoning request at its January 19th meeting, we will no longer be known for the Eno River, award winning schools, and thoughtful development. Instead we will be known as the beacon of a dying fossil fuel industry with an 80-foot-tall beaver sign welcoming travelers. Our home is not a pitstop. Find out more and take action at www.voice4efland.com.

Jared Cates and Del Ward are longtime Orange County residents turned organizers with the newly formed grassroots group 'A Voice for Efland & Orange.'