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## Some land bought for landfill unusable

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**NORTHPORT** | The Black Warrior Solid Waste Disposal Authority bought more than three-quarters of a square mile of property adjacent to its Tuscaloosa County landfill for future expansion — but it won't be using all of it.

The authority cannot use the 153-acre parcel of land east of Rose Boulevard, said Northport city engineer Charles Swann, who is the city's representative on the waste authority's board of directors.



Staff graphic | Anthony Bratina

"We wouldn't put a garbage dump there even if we could," Swann told the Northport City Council during a pre-meeting Monday night. "It may be sold to a developer or put to some other use. But we don't have any use for it."

The landfill is next to U.S. Highway 82 on the western edge of Northport. In March, the authority bought three parcels totaling 529 acres from the Alabama Department of Mental Health for \$4.23 million to add to the landfill's existing 300 acres. The transaction did not become public until last week.

The authority determined that the additional property will extend the life of the landfill beyond 2060 and was less expensive than establishing a new landfill in a more remote location. In addition to the 153-acre parcel, the authority bought a 324-acre tract between Mount Olive Road and Rose Boulevard, on the east side of the existing landfill, and a 35-acre parcel adjacent to U.S. 82 on the west side of the landfill.

Originally, the waste authority only wanted to buy a portion of that property — about half — but the state, which had owned the land, said that the entire area had to be purchased, not just a portion of it, Swann said.

"Our option was to purchase all of the property or none," he said.

According to the Department of Conservation, which handles land sales for the state, the solid waste authority approached the state a year ago about buying the property. The authority board approved the purchase in February. The deed was filed in March.

Since the sale was made public, there has been a backlash, particularly among homeowners who have property bordering the parcel east of Rose Boulevard.

Mayor Bobby Herndon, who said he did not know about the sale until last week, said he is still concerned about property values, even if the waste authority has no plans to expand on the site east of Rose Boulevard. He said he would like to see some of the property bordering Rose Boulevard donated to the city for a dedicated park or green space.

"Even though a dump site may never be built on that property, if you have the solid waste authority owning the land right next door, your property value goes down," Herndon said.

The largest of the three parcels purchased is the former Camp Partlow recreational site that once was used by residents of state mental health facilities in Tuscaloosa. It included cabins, a pavilion, a building and a lake.

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While a portion of that camp eventually may be used by the landfill, the portion of the camp bordering Rose Boulevard to the west contains a lake and wetlands, which means it cannot be used for a landfill, Swann said.

“The trees that you see there now from Rose Boulevard will still be the same trees 30 years from now,” he said during the council’s pre-meeting.

Ken Thrasher, executive director for the authority, agreed.

“That area would more than likely be incorporated into our buffer zone,” Thrasher said.

The waste authority will also do a land use management study of the new property to determine the best use, Thrasher said. That likely could result in the sale of the portion east of Rose Boulevard, he said, but the study has to be done first. That could take from 1 to 3 years, he said.

The property was zoned for manufacturing and that hasn’t changed, said Northport City Administrator Scott Collins. In order for the property to be used as a landfill, it will have to go through the city’s rezoning process, which has not started, he said.

“Other than a change in property owner, nothing with the use has changed and nothing has gone before the city,” Collins said.

Council President William Tunnell said that with the waste authority as the owner the city should have more influence on the use of the property than if the Department of Mental Health had kept it.

“The silver lining is that we have a lot more influence with solid waste than we did before with mental health,” Tunnell said. “I think we’ve realized [from past dealings] that we have no influence on them.”

The Black Warrior Solid Waste Disposal Authority is a public agency that was created by Tuscaloosa County and the cities of Tuscaloosa and Northport in 1993. It manages the 19-year-old landfill, which serves the county, Northport and Tuscaloosa, but also receives garbage from the University of Alabama and from private waste haulers in the county. The landfill, which is licensed by the Alabama Department of Environmental Management, originally was designed to last at least 40 years.

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