

Locals object to water plan

By Jeremy Borden

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Betty Mooney and Dede Smith just don't think it all adds up.

The two Charlottesville residents call the plan to increase Charlottesville and Albemarle County's water supply one of the biggest and most important issues the community faces. And, as the plan is set to get its final permit from state regulators in the next month or so, they don't think officials have looked at all the options.

"The plan that we have right now came up at the last minute," Smith said. "It was presented ... as a done deal."

Smith and Mooney are leading an organization called Citizens for a Sustainable Water Plan, a core group of about eight Charlottesville residents trying to get local leaders and officials to reconsider a plan that has been years in the works.

They've laid out their proposal and what they believe are "myths" about the plan at www.cvillewater.info.

The \$142 million plan - to enlarge the Ragged Mountain Reservoir and build a new dam, then construct a large pipeline from the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir to fill it - was adopted unanimously by both the Charlottesville City Council and the Albemarle Board of Supervisors in 2006.

The two local activists had raised concerns about a large swath of city-owned land that is going to be flooded to enlarge the reservoir. The Ragged Mountain area has hiking trails and other scenic and natural resources, and Mooney and others want the city to be compensated fairly for losing that land.

But Smith and Mooney say that the issue is much larger than just the trails. They don't believe that the plan is eco-friendly or sustainable, especially given its cost.

A better option could be dredging the South Fork Rivanna Reservoir, they say, and a new study should be done.

But area environmentalists, and the Rivanna Water and Sewer Authority's top official, say that option was vetted and discarded years ago.

"Here we are within a month or so of getting that permit, which the community has sought for 25 years," said Ridge Schuyler of the Nature Conservancy, who advocated for the adopted plan. "It is a little frustrating to have someone come up at the end and say, 'You should bear the burden of the fact that I haven't paid attention.'"

While Mooney and others are advocating a new look at dredging, Schuyler says that cost and other factors ruled it out. The South Fork Rivanna Reservoir continues to fill with silt, and dredging would be expensive, complicated and hardly cost efficient, he said. When the

options had been whittled to four in 2005, a fact sheet on dredging said that it would take 67 truckloads of silt per day and cost between \$127 million and \$145 million.

Mooney and Smith say it's far from a done deal, and that dredging should be reconsidered. The city and county have yet to agree to a payment plan, giving the community more time to reflect on its decision and consider new options, they said.

"There hasn't been a public process to deal with all these issues," Mooney said.

RWSA Executive Director Thomas L. Frederick Jr. takes exception to that characterization. Frederick said the authority was praised by the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality for its public-input process, and that the idea of dredging was brought up years ago and discarded.

"It's already been thoroughly studied," Frederick said of dredging. "We spent three-and-a-half years, 11 community meetings, updates with elected officials, dozens of discussions with civic groups. We don't think the question that there has not been enough public input has even been appropriate."

Charlottesville Mayor Dave Norris said he doesn't want to go back to square one, but said it wouldn't hurt to get more information about dredging.

"I want to proceed in a deliberate way and a thoughtful way," Norris said. "I'm not interested in starting all over. It's a good plan, but the devil's in the details."