

# Coalition Looks To Counter Warehouse Construction

By Jadey Mercedes, Staff Writer / The Lafayette

EASTON - A proposed 1-million-square-foot warehouse in Easton has prompted the creation of a vocal coalition of local residents.

Construction of the warehouse — put forward by Indiana-based real estate development company Scannel Properties — was proposed in June. In response to the proposal, a coalition of Easton, Wilson, Palmer Township and Forks Township residents formed with the goal of preventing the warehouse.

Residents involved in the coalition, including several Lafayette College professors, argue that a variety of environmental and health issues could arise from building the warehouse on the land of a former pigment-producing facility.

“There’s a misconception that the concerns are only right on the footprint,” said coalition member and engineering studies professor Benjamin Cohen. “But the damages reverberate far beyond just the actual physical warehouse.”

The group has approximately 766 members from various platforms, such as Facebook, Reddit and the email list, according to photographer Colleen O’Neal, the current leader of the effort.

“The first thing we did was set up a community meeting to share our knowledge because nobody really understood what was going on,” O’Neal said.

Jennifer Talarico, a psychology professor, said she initially worried about the warehouse’s impact on pedestrian safety, traffic and noise pollution. However, after joining the coalition, she became more concerned about the environmental impacts, such as water and air pollution.

Talarico said she is also concerned about the possibility of increased truck traffic near the property; construction of the warehouse is proposed for 1525 Wood Ave., a 106-acre property that sits near the bustling U.S. Route 22 highway.

“When you have more bigger vehicles, it’s more dangerous for everybody else that has to share that same space,” Talarico said.

Cohen echoed Talarico’s concerns of environmental damage and noise pollution. He also mentioned possible health impacts, like safety concerns from the increased traffic and increasing chances of asthma and lung-related illness due to diesel exhaust.

Cohen claimed that “these environmental issues are questions of justice,” but the warehouse matters to Easton and Wilson residents because of the health risks involved.

“This is trying to help the entire valley be healthier and safer,” he said of the coalition.

The warehouse’s land spans three different cities, the majority of it owned by Wilson and the rest by Easton and Palmer Township. The Wilson City Council approved the proposed plan 7-0, according to the minutes of a Wilson City Council meeting held last fall, provided on the coalition effort’s website.

Wilson City Council could not

be reached for comment.

Coalition members said challenges primarily lie in the zoning ordinance of the planned location of the warehouse and the exact amount of land that each town owns. Because Wilson owns most of the land, it has more influence on the decision and development of the proposition.

“I originally went to Wilson Borough the day they passed it,” said Frank Pintabone, an Easton City council member. “I asked them publicly to please table it, come speak to us.”

On the positive side, builders suggested that the warehouse will bring more jobs to the area, bringing a proposed economic benefit to the towns involved, according to O’Neal.

A representative from Scannel did not respond to requests for comment.

During an Easton Area School District meeting on Jan. 28, school board members raised concerns about the warehouse proposition after one member received news of

the warehouse from the coalition, according to board member Meg Sayago. The district was not notified about the warehouse plan until the coalition first brought it up.

Sayago said that in addition to the warehouse’s potential environmental issues, the board is concerned about the impact on bus routes due to truck traffic.

Paxinosa Elementary School, Easton Middle School, Easton High School and Tracy Elementary School are all within a mile or two of the proposed warehouse’s location, according to Sayago. While the school board has no power over the decision, Sayago said a resolution to express these concerns is being drafted and is expected to be voted on in April.

The coalition meets every Thurs□

In a follow-up email, O’Neal wrote that there are conversations to “evolve the coalition in the long term.” Recently, the website has implemented a testimonial section where active coalition members share their input on the situation.

“It is good that our community is coming together around one issue,” O’Neal said. “Because it affects all of us.”

