

Watauga Residents Seek ETJ-Type Protection

Written by Steve Frank
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In a press release, the newly formed Watauga Citizens for Local Control announced that they have been accepted as a chapter of the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League. The Watauga group is centering their new effort on a Watauga County Commission meeting August 19th in which commissioners will hear from citizens in the former Boone ETJ about protections for their properties. At their August 5th meeting, members expressed concerns that polluting industries have targeted their now-protected communities for dangerous and undesirable facilities.

Watauga Citizens for Local Control's spokesman Lee Stroupe said, "We want to keep the protections we now have under ETJ. We want to keep polluting industry out of our neighborhoods. Stroupe had been active in the fight to prevent an asphalt plant on Roby Green Road during the 1990's which resulted in an ETJ for the Seven Oaks community.

Lou Zeller, who now directs the Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League, welcomed the new group, saying "The legislature's removal of Boone's ETJ is like the camel's nose under the tent," wondering why Boone was singled out. In June, NC Senate Bill 865, introduced by Senator Dan Soucek, stripped Boone of its ETJ power effective January 1st, 2015. However, the bill left ETJs in place for 200 other North Carolina municipalities. Zeller called the law "A bad precedent for this and other communities who merely want to protect their homes and families."

Zeller said that just what control might be available from the county is not yet clear.

The public hearing on ETJ will be held on August 19 at 6:00 PM during the Watauga County Board of Commissioners meeting.

The Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League was founded in 1984 to protect the High Country from a nuclear waste dump and today has chapters and projects in six states.