

# Nutrien move to PVMS site okayed

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The Mecklenburg County Board of Supervisors has approved a new home for Nutrien Ag Solutions after a massive fire destroyed the company's South Hill warehouse on July 6.

The seed, fertilizer and farm chemical company will move to the vacated Park View Middle School property at 365 Dockery Road in South Hill after supervisors voted Monday to rezone the 35-acre school campus from agricultural to industrial.

Park View Middle School closed in 2022 with the consolidation of the county's secondary schools at a single campus in Baskerville, home to Mecklenburg County high and middle schools. Abandoned school buildings in South Hill and Skipwith were demolished earlier this year.

After approving the rezoning request, supervisors took a second vote to approve the sale of the PVMS site to Nutrien Ag Solutions at a price of \$10,000 per acre. The vote came Monday night during the board's regular monthly meeting in Boydton.

County Administrator Alex Gottschalk told supervisors that "the return proceeds will almost pay for the cost of demolition of the school." He called the transaction a "straight up land sale that saved almost 30 [Nutrien] jobs in the county."

The sale comes with a few conditions, according to Gottschalk. The county must complete demolition work and remove an old fuel storage tank at the property, Nutrien will do its own testing of the campus site to ensure there are no brownfield issues and Nutrien is required to preserve an existing highway marker denoting the location as a "long-serving educational facility" for both East End High School and Park View Middle School.

East End High School was one of two public high schools built to educate the county's Black student population during the era of segregation.

The decision to rezone the property for Nutrien was not without opposition. Ahead of the vote Monday night, two nearby property owners asked board members to vote against the rezoning.

Lucille Trimm, who owns land adjacent to Park View Middle School, said she “firmly objects to any kind of building in that area” due to the historic significance of the site, which she said dates back to the 1700s and 1800s. “Future generations will know nothing about the history of the county if you don’t stop encroaching on the rural country character,” she said, holding up an arrowhead that she said was found at the Dockery Road property.

“In 1890 Dr. Ogburn purchased the property and sold water from [Dockery] creek,” which runs adjacent to the road, Trimm said. “I don’t know how Nutrien will impact that creek.”

“I don’t want Dockery Road to lose its rural character,” she added.

Willie Bennett, a Dockery Road neighbor, echoed her comments by describing the 365 Dockery Road site as “historic.”

Bennett proposed that Nutrien find an alternate location that is not close to families and homes. He asked supervisors rhetorically, “Would you want to live near a warehouse?”

Other speakers, however, favored Nutrien’s move to the site. Chad Fuller said he owns a body shop that lies next door to the company’s razed warehouse on Danville Street in South Hill, “I had no problem with them,” Fuller told supervisors before sharing his concerns about the potential loss of jobs and the impact on local farmer, should Nutrien leave the county.

“We are not in a position to lose part-time jobs let alone full-time jobs. Farmers need to know chemicals are nearby and can be delivered on time,” Fuller said.

Ricky Thomason, a self-described “piddle farmer,” stressed the importance of local agriculture and Nutrien’s key role in supporting Mecklenburg’s farm economy. “We have a bad habit of eating three times a day and we need agriculture for the next generation. When I look at a Nutrien truck I will think of the food and the fiber that we need,” he said.

Bill Coleman, who worked for Nutrien for 41 years, told supervisors, “ I know there are concerns [about moving Nutrien to Dockery Road] but [Nutrien’s] safety and environmental policies are stricter than those from [state and federal regulators]. Without Nutrien there will be a huge void in the agriculture community.”

Austin Puryear, local facility manager for Nutrien, said he hoped to allay some of the concerns shared by neighbors on Dockery Road by explaining his ties to the community and the safety record of the company.

“I am a lifelong resident of the county. I’ve been door-to-door with the neighbors of the new site. There will be no manufacturing. We store chemicals, fertilizer and seed. The company has a high standard for safety. We are regulated by DEQ, EPA, OSHA, and even Homeland Security. It [the new Nutrien warehouse] will be a state of the art warehouse and all [seed, fertilizers and chemicals] will be contained within the warehouse. We will go above and

beyond to ensure that we do everything possible to make for a smooth transition and to be a good neighbor.”

Puryear said he hopes to have the new warehouse completed within the next 12 months.

“Working closely with this local company to remain in our county and to retain 28 jobs that serve our large agriculture industry has been a key focus of the county Board of Supervisors and the Agriculture Advisory Committee,” said Gottschalk.

According to officials, the 35-acre site provides Nutrien with flexibility and room for future growth as needed. Initially, the company will build a 50,000-60,000 square foot warehouse that will house seed, fertilizer and chemicals, with office space attached to it. Nutrien will continue to operate other facilities on Lunenburg Avenue and W. Main Street in South Hill but eventually plans to consolidate its bulk fertilizer warehouses at the Dockery Road site.

Nutrien intends to build a 4,000 square foot shop around back for work on vehicles.

“Nutrien Ag Solutions has been happy to find a location outside the town, but still within its home county. We are delighted to still be able to serve our customers from a site that will create an easier flow and efficiency,” said Puryear in a prepared statement.

Nutrien Ag Solutions began operations in the Town of South Hill in 1920 as Robertson Fertilizer. At the time, the warehouse site was selected due to the access to rail and being able to bring in a great deal of products easily. There were several buyouts over the years, but in 2006 Agrium purchased the business and it became Crop Production Services. That name remained until 2018 when the Nutrien Ag Solutions nameplate emerged from a company merger.

Supervisors chairman Jim Jennings was quoted in a media release saying, “The Board is extremely happy that we were able to assist our agricultural partners to stay in Mecklenburg County. Nutrien Ag Solutions is a wonderful asset to our community and the region.”