



Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health & Justice

For Immediate Release

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Public Hearing on Uniontown's Failing Sewage Treatment System

City of Uniontown and Sentell Engineering Announce Public Hearing on Decades-Old Sewage Disaster

On Monday December 5th at 5 PM, the City of Uniontown, Alabama and Sentell Engineering will hold a public hearing at the Uniontown City Hall auditorium to update residents on plans to address Uniontown's wastewater treatment system. Following the 5 PM hearing, the City of Uniontown will hold its regularly scheduled City Council meeting at 6 PM.

Uniontown, a town of about 2,500 people in southern Perry County, has a small wastewater treatment system designed to treat an average of 525,000 gallons per day in its lagoon cells located near Robert C. Hatch High School. The treated sewage is pumped almost 4 miles to a 70 acre sprayfield where it is land-applied by industrial sprinklers.

The system has never worked properly, allowing the effluent to run over the land and flow onto private property and eventually into Freetown Creek. The City's wastewater permit allows groundwater discharge only, expressly excluding discharges to surface waters. The permit also does not authorize raw sewage overflows, which have been fouling local creeks for decades along with the sprayfield runoff.

The Uniontown community and its downstream neighbors along Cottonwood Creek and Big Prairie Creek in the Black Warrior River basin, and along Freetown Creek and Chilatchee Creek in the Alabama River basin, have suffered exposure to partially or improperly treated sewage resulting in serious concerns about property value, public health, government accountability, and water quality.

Ben Eaton, Uniontown resident and Vice President of Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health & Justice (BBC), said, "I joined the group because of this issue, I am very concerned about the overflows and sewage problems which can be traced back to 1991 with the opening of Harvest Select and 1992 with the construction of that sprayfield. According to Harvest Select, their maximum flow for 2016 is reported as 468,000

gallons per day, we feel like Harvest Select's waste is influencing the daily sewage overflows into Freetown Creek. We don't want any more sewage overflows, sprayfields or wetlands, we want a treatment plant able to return clean water to our rivers. And we want to be included when the City of Uniontown and Sentell go back to the drawing board. We plan to be there on December 5th and hope we have some good news."

According to the engineering report submitted in July to the Alabama Department of Environmental Management (ADEM) from Sentell, four options are on the table:

- Option # 1, build a wetland with the same discharge to Freetown Creek for around \$11.4 million;
- Option #2, upgrade the lagoon and pipe sewage over 20 miles to the Black Warrior River for around \$13.7 million;
- Option #3, build a mechanical plant able to discharge into Freetown Creek for around \$12.6 million;
- OR Option #4, build a mechanical plant and pipe sewage over 20 miles to the Black Warrior River for around \$16.4 million.

Nelson Brooke, Black Warrior Riverkeeper, said: "The City of Uniontown's lagoon is being hydraulically overloaded by Harvest Select, newly constructed Sprayfield #2 can never be used, and Sprayfield #1 continues to illegally overflow into Freetown Creek on a regular basis, despite having spent \$4.8 Million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) between 2012-15 to address issues. Legal actions between Uniontown and ADEM over sewage problems date back to November 5, 1987, yet problems persist. Clearly ADEM is not up to the task of holding Uniontown accountable to the law, as local residents and downstream neighbors are not being properly notified when sewage spills take place. With an additional history of illegal lagoon overflows polluting Cottonwood Creek and downstream Big Prairie Creek along the Black Warrior River, Black Warrior Riverkeeper stands by the BBC in demanding a resolution to this fiasco once and for all - the City of Uniontown needs to construct a mechanical wastewater treatment plant to properly treat the area's wastewater."

President of BBC, Esther Calhoun, Uniontown resident and President of BBC, stated "We had hope in 2012 with the \$4.8 Million, we had hope that the City and State (ADEM) might listen. We know sprayfields and wetlands won't work down here and they (City of Uniontown, Sentell and ADEM) know that too. We have been asking the responsible parties to fix these problems for over 4 years and we won't turn back now. We, BBC, in order to form a better Uniontown demand the following:

- ~a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment plant for a healthy Uniontown
- ~that responsible industries pay for their fare share of a new treatment plant
- ~no increases to water or sewer rates, no shutoffs to public water or sewer

~an investigation and accounting for the \$4.8 Million USDA project
~that the City replace Sentell and hold them responsible for millions of wasted \$\$\$\$
~hire a new engineer based on a democratic, town-hall decision-making process
~that the City require Harvest Select to limit its contribution of wastewater into Uniontown's system."



*Left: (11.20) Freetown Creek Fouled by sewage overflows, photo by Kimberly Brothers
Right: (11.4) Illegal Sprayfield sewage overflow into Freetown Creek, photo by Adam Johnston*

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Black Belt Citizens Fighting for Health & Justice works towards a Uniontown and Black Belt region where all people will unite to act in love for shared liberty and justice for all. We, the Freedom Fighters, based in Uniontown Alabama will demonstrate faith in action by embracing and encouraging solutions against all injustices.