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## **A 'mountain' nobody wants Pressure builds to close northwest Atlanta dump Rising opposition: The Atlanta City Council is set to vote today on shutting down the Gun Club Road landfill.**

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Neighbors call it Trash Hill. But it looks more like Kennesaw Mountain.

The hill is Gun Club Road landfill, a 106-acre, 20-story-high mound of refuse near the Perry Homes housing project in northwest Atlanta. It grows higher and wider every day, as it swallows the majority of the city's garbage.

The Atlanta City Council is scheduled to vote today on a request by homeowners living near the landfill to close it immediately. After 20 years of watching the dump rise, the residents say they've had enough of the rats, the insects, the litter and, most of all, the smell that blows off the hill looming above them.

"You should have been out here last summer," said Carl Mason, 43, who has lived within a few hundred feet of the dump for 16 years. "We had excessive mosquitoes, gnats. We've got roaches the size of this," he said, spreading his thumb and forefinger wide apart.

Spurred by worries that the landfill might be causing health problems, the community began meeting regularly and lobbying officials. If closed, state law requires that the entire landfill be sealed with an 18-inch layer of clay and 6 inches of topsoil, and that it be monitored closely for leaks for 30 years.

Sanitation officials cite cost

The proposal to close the dump has strong support on the City Council, but sanitation officials say doing so would be a disaster for Atlanta that could cost \$ 25 million in 1993 alone.

"From the time that we stop taking waste into Gun Club, we're estimating in about three months time, the other landfills are gonna be at capacity," said Atlanta Public Works Commissioner Michael Pack.

By spring, Mr. Pack said, the city would be forced into the expensive alternative of paying private landfills to take its garbage.

But in impassioned pleas to the City Council Finance Committee last week, the neighbors said they have paid the price for two decades, and it's time for the rest of Atlanta to share the burden.

"We know it costs money," said Robert Lee Smith, 71, who has lived in the neighborhood for 35 years. "Please consider

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us as human beings."

Gun Club landfill sits in the middle of four neighborhoods made up of several hundred houses owned mostly by retired black residents. Most of the streets are lined with modest, well-maintained homes built in the 1960s, when the land adjacent to them was a thick forest of pines.

But the residents say illegal dumping began on the property in 1965. Nine years later, the city bought the property, and by 1977, trucks filled with city waste were rumbling in and the mountain began its climb.

Many residents were unaware

Because state regulations did not require it until 1991, liners were not put in the landfill to prevent groundwater contamination, wells were not installed to test the water and no efforts were made to determine what had been dumped at the site before the city bought it. Proctor Creek, which flows along the edge of the landfill, became choked with trash and gravel.

For many years, many residents were unaware of what was being done with the heavy machinery they heard operating on the other side of the trees at their property line. But by the mid-1980s, they began to smell the fumes every afternoon. When residents first complained several years ago, they say, nobody listened.

"It's bad when we have city officials who will defend the indefensible, particularly when we're the custodians of the people," said Councilman Jared Samples, who represents the area and sponsored the resolution to close the dump.

"We're supposed to be there to help them, to look out for them," he said. "For the last 25 years, that community has been dumped on by the people who were supposed to be looking out for them."

Mr. Samples maintains that closing Gun Club would cost about \$ 6 million and that enough landfill space exists to handle city garbage for two to three more years.

Monitoring to begin

City officials say Gun Club's neighbors are exaggerating the problems. Four groundwater monitoring wells are scheduled to be installed beginning today, and 50 more will follow.

Tests of Proctor Creek have detected no contaminants, Mr. Pack said. The city installed a system to collect and burn off methane gas from inside the landfill in 1987, and all inactive areas of the dump are now covered with soil and grass, he said.

Mr. Pack recently asked the federal government to determine whether the landfill poses any health risks, but he doubts that it does.

"There is no evidence that there are contaminants leaking from that landfill, that the landfill is causing health problems," Mr. Pack said.

The public works department wants to keep the landfill open for another five years. That would give the city time to gear up a citywide recycling program and win approval for a 300-acre expansion of the city landfill on Key Road in DeKalb County, Mr. Pack said.

But the residents say the city's trash already has been their problem for too long and they aren't backing off.

"We finally got the city's attention," said Willie Peterson, a 28- year resident of the area. "I'm too old to start anywhere else."

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**GRAPHIC:** Photo: A guard closes the gates to the landfill. The proposal to close the dump has strong support on the City Council. /JOHN SPINK / Staff Color Photo: Northwest Atlanta resident Willie Peterson with grandson Za Brooks, 11, surveys litter along the banks of Proctor Creek. /Photos by JOHN SPINK / Staff Color Photo: Proctor Creek, which flows along the edge of the Gun Club Road landfill, has become choked with debris.

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