

# Board considers partnership between EcoComplex and UNC-Charlotte



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The Catawba County Board of Commissioners will consider a memorandum of understanding with the University of North Carolina at Charlotte allowing three of the university's applied research centers to perform research at the Catawba County EcoComplex at the board meeting Tuesday.

The EcoComplex, in conjunction with the Blackburn landfill in Newton, is a resource recovery center that turns waste products into energy sources. Catawba County waste generates methane gas, and the gas creates energy to power generators.

"It's like that old saying 'One man's trash is another man's treasure,'" said Amanda Kain, waste reduction coordinator at the Catawba County EcoComplex.

UNC-Charlotte's three research centers include Energy Production and Infrastructure Center (EPIC), Infrastructure, Design, Environment and Sustainability (IDEAS) and North Carolina Motorsports and Automotive Research Center (NCMARC).

Research by the centers at the EcoComplex includes testing sustainable alternative energy sources, improving energy efficiency and reducing vehicle emissions.

"EPIC is looking for innovative ways to create energy," said Dr. Barry Burks, associate director of the Charlotte Research Institute.

Burks said the EcoComplex will be a "full-scale test environment" for UNC-Charlotte students and faculty.

The EcoComplex will educate engineering students through applied research.

UNC-Charlotte students won't be the only people to benefit from the partnership.

The partnership between the EcoComplex and UNC-Charlotte research centers will benefit the county and its residents in many ways, Burks said.

Research on energy generated through waste products will reduce the volume of waste in Catawba County's landfill.

The reduced volume saves money for Catawba County residents, Kain said.

"It keeps solid waste fee costs at a minimum," she said.

Research could also develop technology benefitting the environment.

"We want to generate intellectual property," Burks said.

The technologies tested and created through UNC-Charlotte's research could bring jobs to Catawba County in the future, he said.

Creating a stable waste management system with UNC-Charlotte will create economic development opportunities to the area, Kain said.

"The EcoComplex is leading the way in green efforts, and it puts Catawba County on the map," Kain said.

Burks said Catawba County is fortunate to have the EcoComplex in the area.

"There are a lot of places where folks don't want to change what they're doing," Burks said. "People at the EcoComplex are very forward-thinking,"

If the board decides to execute the memorandum, research at the EcoComplex will use some of Catawba County's resources.

"We are going to be using air, water and power," Burks said.

A significant amount of energy won't be used, he said. Much of the energy used by the research will be powered from the waste at the landfill.

The Catawba County Board of Commissioners will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday at the old courthouse in Newton.