

# Buc-ee's Burden:

How Mega Gas Stations Hurt  
Community Health And Wealth





## Credits and Acknowledgments

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The first four sections detail the primary concerns communities have raised about Buc-ee's. Section 5 discusses several stories of organized opposition to gas station and mega gas station projects. Section 6 serves as a tool kit with questions and resources for communities considering mega gas station projects. The report concludes with a summary of further reading and resources, and a bibliography.

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# Buc-ee's Is Coming To An Interstate Near You!

For decades, gas stations have pocked the country with a slew of environmental problems. From leaking underground storage tanks to unmeasured air pollution and toxic runoff, refueling has been a quiet and ubiquitous by-product of the fossil fuel industry—a symbol of the climate crisis so pervasive that it almost goes unnoticed.

Even as the hottest years on record continue to pile up as a direct result of human consumption of fossil fuels, and the world's waterways continue to be threatened by oil spills, runoff, and other effects of extractive industries, the business of fossil fuels continues apace.

Texas-based Buc-ee's, the world's first chain mega gas station, is now emerging as a new symbol of US society's embrace of car culture. These popular shops are more than just convenience stores or fueling stations: they are sprawling sites that generally house more than a hundred gas pumps (compared with a standard gas station's ten to twelve pumps), a shop the size of a big-box store, hundreds of parking places, and dozens of bathroom stalls.

Buc-ee's supersizing effort is topped off by a location opened in Luling, Texas, in June 2024.<sup>1</sup> At over seventy-five thousand square feet and 120 gas pumps, this station—on the site of the original Buc-ee's mega gas station—is now the world's largest gas station and convenience store. But a Buc-ee's location in Sevierville, Tennessee, and a forthcoming Buc-ee's in Mebane, North Carolina, are close behind. The Mebane location will cover over thirty-one acres of land and include a seventy-four-thousand-square-foot building and 120 pumping stations.

These expansive sites have been welcomed in some cases by local leaders in search of new sources of jobs,<sup>2</sup> and cheered by Buc-ee's fan base—the store's strong branding has a cultlike following, complete with subreddits and Facebook groups. But as Buc-ee's, which was started in Texas in 1982, embarks on a massive expansion project, an opposition movement has arisen that focuses on both local and global effects of the mega gas station phenomenon.

In North Carolina in December 2023, the Mebane Planning Board advised rejecting Buc-ee's,<sup>3</sup> but the Mebane City Council approved the business a month later. The Buc-ee's now set to open will be just off Interstate 40/85 in Mebane, a city of about 18,000 people in North Carolina's Piedmont region, midway between Raleigh and Winston-Salem.

Buc-ee's Mebane proposal has sparked a robust public debate, with critics and supporters speaking for nearly nine hours before the city council vote, and it's gotten coverage in the local and regional media. Because the Mebane Buc-ee's expects five million visitors a year, arriving in as many as two thousand cars an hour during peak times, locals have raised concerns about increased traffic and noise at the exit, which already has a Love's Travel Stop and a Pilot Travel Center.

They also worry about the massive store's additional stress on local infrastructure, and the possibility of leaks from the underground storage tanks into groundwater and nearby streams, already a widespread problem across the nation. And a local Indigenous people's advocacy group objects that the Buc-ee's would desecrate Mebane's section of the Occaneechi Great Trading Path, a historic trail that runs from Virginia to Alabama.<sup>4</sup>

But largely overlooked in the media coverage of the Buc-ee's proposal to date are the health and economic consequences of putting such a large number of gasoline pumps in one place.

<sup>1</sup> Monica Sager, "World's Largest Gas Station Opens in Texas," Newsweek, June 10, 2024, <https://www.newsweek.com/bucees-gas-station-convenience-store-rest-stop-record-holder-texas-1910426>.

<sup>2</sup> Michael Sasso, "Forget Factories, Small US Towns Want Buc-ee's Gas Stations," Bloomberg, January 23, 2025, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-01-23/southern-towns-in-the-us-want-more-buc-ee-s-gas-stations>.

<sup>3</sup> "Planning Board Meeting: December 11, 2023," Mebane, NC, <https://cityofmebanenc.gov/meetings/planning-board-meeting-december-11-2023/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Protect the Great Trading Path," 7 Directions of Service, <https://7directionsofservice.com/great-trading-path>.

Many people living and working near mega gas stations may not be aware that:

- From their underground storage tanks, gas stations routinely vent toxic vapors directly into the air. Benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene—components of gasoline known collectively as “BTEX”—are known to cause cancer and other serious health problems in people who breathe them in. The larger the number of tanks, the more venting occurs. Vapor leaks also occur during the fueling of cars and the refilling of underground storage tanks. In addition, gasoline fumes contribute to local air pollution in the form of ozone, which can worsen asthma and damage lungs.
- Emerging science shows that gas station vapors are even more damaging to people’s health than previously thought. It suggests that gas stations may currently be placed too close to people’s homes and workplaces for safety, a fact that is not accounted for in current regulations.
- Living near a gas station is among the known risk factors for childhood leukemia due to benzene exposure.
- Underground storage tanks at gas stations frequently leak, especially as they degrade over time. These leaks of the toxic hydrocarbons in gasoline can permanently damage water and soil in the area surrounding a gas station, and cleanups are poorly regulated and often never completed. Buc-ee’s has claimed publicly that it has “not had a reportable spill” at any of its locations, but that is a misleading statement, concealing reports of leaking underground storage tanks at seven Texas locations.
- Gas stations are subject to lax regulation at the state, federal, and local levels. But local officials do have the power to use zoning laws to prevent construction of gas stations and/or mega gas station projects in their communities.
- Gas stations can depress local residential property values, effectively stealing wealth from the same people they put at heightened risk for painful and costly health conditions. Meanwhile, the emerging science on gas stations and their health effects makes nearby properties even less attractive to buyers.
- Buc-ee’s overpromises on the quality of jobs. The company is poorly rated by many former employees and frequently does not pay a living wage for the areas in which it operates.
- Buc-ee’s accepts government subsidies at a cost to taxpayers. The company, whose annual revenue Forbes estimated at \$275 million in 2017, pursues tax breaks and other subsidies ultimately paid for by the same people its pollution hurts.
- Taxpayers help fund environmental cleanups when companies like Buc-ee’s leave behind leaking tanks and other damage.
- Buc-ee’s has a political agenda. The wealthy Texan co-owners of Buc-ee’s, Arch “Beaver” Aplin III and Don or Donald Wasek, donate millions of dollars at the federal and state levels to far-right Republican politicians who oppose strict regulations, thus supporting an oversight system that puts people and workers in and near their facilities at greater risk of harm.
- Communities are organizing to stop mega gas stations and to advocate for a just transition away from fossil fuels in general. In 2022, Efland, North Carolina, was successful at preventing a Buc-ee’s from opening there. And local zoning ordinances in Petaluma, California; Denver, Colorado; and other cities and towns across the world are a mechanism for preventing new gas station construction altogether, or for limiting and imposing setbacks and other regulations.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The above statements are further substantiated with citations in the body of this report. All statements of fact in the body of the report have been cited to original sources to the best of our ability; where there is no individual citation, it is the author’s opinion that this statement is accurate based on multiple publicly available sources.

## 01.

# Buc-ee's Threatens Community Health

For those living and working nearby, gas stations present potentially serious safety threats, from fuel spills to fires and explosions. In addition, gas stations' underground storage tanks have a documented likelihood of leaking as they age, with liquid pollution seeping into groundwater, streams, and soil, and entering nearby homes and businesses as vapor. Gas stations also pollute the environment even when everything's working as it should, and this routine air pollution gets little attention from regulators or the public. These combined threats to community health include potential exposures to chemicals that can cause cancer, asthma, long-term respiratory problems, and premature death.<sup>6</sup>

## Mega gas stations harm air quality

Petroleum gasoline is made up of a mix of chemicals, a number of which are toxic to humans and other animals. Collectively, the most toxic chemicals in gasoline are called BTEX—benzene, toluene, ethylbenzene, and xylene. In addition to posing risks when released into soil or water, they can also cause problems for air quality—an aspect of gas stations that has been neglected by many regulatory frameworks.

Vapor drift can occur during the process of delivering gas from tanker trucks to underground storage tanks, during regular gas pumping, as a result of spilled gas, and through release vents and processors. Multiple studies have shown that proximity to refueling stations increases exposure to BTEX chemicals in the air, posing health risks for gas station workers as well as people who live in close proximity to fueling stations.<sup>7</sup> A 2018 peer-reviewed study found hazardous levels of benzene up to 524 feet away from active gas pumps—and noted that gas stations are venting far higher concentrations of toxic fumes than previously thought, which could make even the limited existing regulations irrelevant.<sup>8</sup>

Benzene, in particular, is a known carcinogen, not just correlated with cancer but shown to cause it. Exposure to benzene can contribute to blood cancers and cause leukemia in children.<sup>9</sup> In addition to cancer-causing benzene, research has shown that the presence of ambient BTEX in the air correlates with the increased risk of asthma, increased severity and frequency of asthma symptoms, bronchitis, wheezing, harm to the immune system, harm to children's development, harm to the nervous system, and weakened pulmonary (lung) function in elderly people.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Mason Leavitt et al., *Beneath the Pump: The Threat of Petroleum Contamination, Beyond Toxics*, 2023, [https://www.beyondtoxics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BeneathThePump\\_TheThreat-of-PetroleumContamination\\_FINAL\\_10-13-23.pdf](https://www.beyondtoxics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BeneathThePump_TheThreat-of-PetroleumContamination_FINAL_10-13-23.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> Wan-Kuen Jo and Kung-Cho Moon, "Housewives' Exposure to Volatile Organic Compounds Relative to Proximity to Roadside Service Stations," *Atmospheric Environment* 33, no. 18 (August 1, 1999): 2921–28, [https://doi.org/10.1016/s1352-2310\(99\)00097-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/s1352-2310(99)00097-7); Isabel M. Morales Terrés et al., "Assessing the Impact of Petrol Stations on Their Immediate Surroundings," *Journal of Environmental Management* 91, no. 12 (September 1, 2010): 2754–62, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jenvman.2010.08.009>; Markus Hilpert et al., "Hydrocarbon Release during Fuel Storage and Transfer at Gas Stations: Environmental and Health Effects," *Current Environmental Health Reports* 2, no. 4 (October 5, 2015): 412–22, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40572-015-0074-8>.

<sup>8</sup> Leavitt et al., *Beneath the Pump*, 5; Markus Hilpert et al., "Vent Pipe Emissions from Storage Tanks at Gas Stations: Implications for Setback Distances," *Science of the Total Environment* 650 (September 24, 2018): 2239–50, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.scitotenv.2018.09.303>; "Gas Stations Vent Far More Toxic Fumes than Previously Thought," *Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health*, October 3, 2022, <https://www.publichealth.columbia.edu/news/gas-stations-vent-far-more-toxic-fumes-previously-thought>.

<sup>9</sup> Peter F. Infante, "Residential Proximity to Gasoline Stations and Risk of Childhood Leukemia," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 185, no. 1 (December 6, 2016): 1–4, <https://doi.org/10.1093/aje/kww130>; P. Brosselin et al., "Acute Childhood Leukaemia and Residence Next to Petrol Stations and Automotive Repair Garages: The ESCALE Study (SFCE)," *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 66, no. 9 (February 12, 2009): 598–606, <https://doi.org/10.1136/oem.2008.042432>; R. M. Harrison et al., "Analysis of Incidence of Childhood Cancer in the West Midlands of the United Kingdom in Relation to Proximity to Main Roads and Petrol Stations," *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 56, no. 11 (November 1, 1999): 774–80, <https://doi.org/10.1136/oem.56.11.774>; Wan-Kuen Jo and Jee-Won Oh, "Exposure to Methyl Tertiary Butyl Ether and Benzene in Close Proximity to Service Stations," *Journal of the Air & Waste Management Association* 51, no. 8 (August 1, 2001): 1122–28, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10473289.2001.10464339>.

A gas station with ten to twelve times the pumps of a standard station, that specifically encourages long visits for tourists, poses an as-yet unquantified level of health risk to workers and visitors. Toxicity levels are dependent on exposure over time, which means the people most vulnerable to air pollution at mega gas stations are the workers, especially in states where self-service gas pumping is not permitted. Gas station workers have been shown to experience benzene exposures well above the limits recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for many hours a week.<sup>11</sup> And even customers experience a brief spell of overexposure, with one study finding “an 18-fold increase in breath benzene levels” in gas station customers after refueling.<sup>12</sup>

Toxic vapors from gas are not the only form of air pollution associated with gas stations. There is also the pollution caused by vehicles: combustion engines driving, idling in traffic, and idling or moving slowly through the Buc-ee’s parking lot. The transportation sector is the single biggest source of carbon pollution in the United States, contributing to the ongoing crisis of climate change and creating local health hazards.<sup>13</sup> Dr. Jennifer Richmond-Bryant, an associate professor in the Department of Forestry and Environmental Resources at North Carolina State University, raised particulate matter from combustion as an additional concern in her testimony to the Mebane City Council in January 2024. She noted that both short- and long-term exposure to particulate matter from hydrocarbons, to ozone that forms as a result of carbon emissions, and to nitrogen dioxide resulting from emissions can cause cardiovascular health problems, respiratory problems, and even premature death.<sup>14</sup>

Given all this, it is alarming that no studies have been conducted on toxic vapor exposure or exposure to ozone and particulate matter in the context of a mega gas station project. That means that as Buc-ee’s is building gas stations of unprecedented size, there is no up-to-date science on how exactly the effects of air pollution will be multiplied with an increase in the number of pumps, an increase in the numbers of gas delivery and small spills, and an enormous increase in daily traffic. In a mega gas station project, it’s likely these problems will be multiplied by how many more gas pumps are available—up to twenty times more than regular gas stations.

In conclusion, we know the chemicals that pollute the air around gas stations can cause long-term and serious health problems including cancer in children, and we know the effects will only be more severe in a concentrated and giant facility such as a Buc-ee’s. The proposed Buc-ee’s in Mebane, North Carolina, is across from a mobile home community and up the block from a community park. Will any safeguards be put in place, even something as simple as air pollution monitors?

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<sup>10</sup> Leavitt et al., *Beneath the Pump*, 3; H. I. Yoon et al., “Exposure to Volatile Organic Compounds and Loss of Pulmonary Function in the Elderly,” *European Respiratory Journal* 36, no. 6 (March 29, 2010): 1270–76, <https://doi.org/10.1183/09031936.00153509>; Ahmed A. Arif and Syed M. Shah, “Association between Personal Exposure to Volatile Organic Compounds and Asthma among US Adult Population,” *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health* 80, no. 8 (March 14, 2007): 711–19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-007-0183-2>; K. Rumchev, “Association of Domestic Exposure to Volatile Organic Compounds with Asthma in Young Children,” *Thorax* 59, no. 9 (August 27, 2004): 746–51, <https://doi.org/10.1136/thx.2003.013680>; Mary Ellen Gordian, Alistair W. Stewart, and Stephen S. Morris, “Evaporative Gasoline Emissions and Asthma Symptoms,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 7, no. 8 (August 4, 2010): 3051–62, <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph7083051>; Ralph J. Delfino et al., “Respiratory Symptoms and Peak Expiratory Flow in Children with Asthma in Relation to Volatile Organic Compounds in Exhaled Breath and Ambient Air,” *Journal of Exposure Science & Environmental Epidemiology* 13, no. 5 (September 1, 2003): 348–63, <https://doi.org/10.1038/sj.jea.7500287>.

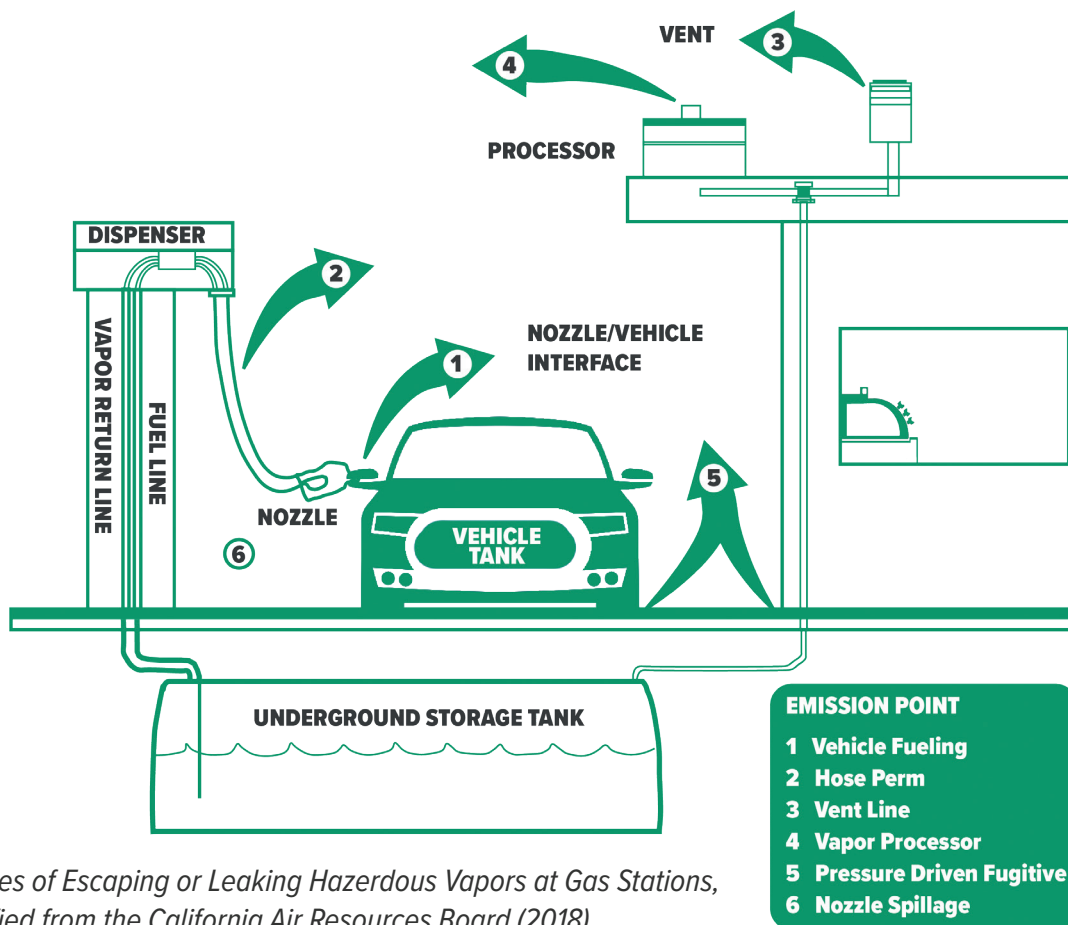
<sup>11</sup> Tanasorn Tunsaringkarn et al., “Cancer Risk Analysis of Benzene, Formaldehyde and Acetaldehyde on Gasoline Station Workers,” *Journal of Environmental Engineering & Ecological Science* (2012), [https://www.academia.edu/8175058/Cancer\\_risk\\_analysis\\_of\\_benzene\\_formaldehyde\\_and\\_acetaldehyde\\_on\\_gasoline\\_station\\_workers](https://www.academia.edu/8175058/Cancer_risk_analysis_of_benzene_formaldehyde_and_acetaldehyde_on_gasoline_station_workers).

<sup>12</sup> Peter P. Egeghy Jr. et al., “Environmental and Biological Monitoring of Benzene during Self-Service Automobile Refueling,” *Environmental Health Perspectives* 108 (November 2000), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1240202/pdf/ehp0108-001195.pdf>.

<sup>13</sup> Matthew N. Metz and Janelle London, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot: Gas Stations and the Transition Away from Gasoline,” *Environmental Law Reporter* 51 (2021), [https://www.eli.org/sites/default/files/docs/elr\\_pdf/51.10054.pdf](https://www.eli.org/sites/default/files/docs/elr_pdf/51.10054.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> City Council Meeting: January 8, 2024,” Mebane, NC, <https://storage.googleapis.com/proudcity/mebanenc/2024/01/Approved-Minutes-Regular-Mtg.-January-8-2024-with-PowerPoint-and-Submittals-draft.pdf>.





*Sources of Escaping or Leaking Hazardous Vapors at Gas Stations, modified from the California Air Resources Board (2018)*

## BENZENE

- Infects bone marrow
- Can harm immune system
- Can reduce red blood cells
- Suspected to harm nervous system
- Decreases pulmonary function for elderly
- Increases asthma symptoms, wheezing, & severity of asthma attacks

## TOLUENE

- Harms developing children
- Suspected to harm immune system
- Decreases pulmonary function for elderly
- Increases asthma symptoms, wheezing, & severity of asthma attacks

## ETHYLBENZENE

- Can damage hearing
- Affects fetal development
- Suspected to harm immune system
- Decreases pulmonary function for elderly

## XYLENE

- Decreases pulmonary function for elderly
- Increases asthma symptoms, wheezing, & severity of asthma attacks
- Suspected of harming childhood development, & damaging immune system

*Known Human Health Impacts of BTEX Exposure, modified from [www.beyondtoxics.org](http://www.beyondtoxics.org)\**

\* Sources: Yoon et al., 2010; Arif & Shah, 2007; Rumchev et al., 2004; Gordian et al., 2010; Delfino et al., 2003a; Delfino et al., 2003b; Billionnet et al., 2011; Hirsch et al., 1999; Bentayab et al., 2013; Sierra Club, 2004; Bolden et al., 2015

## Mega gas stations threaten water and soil

### Runoff and Surface Water

All development projects come with risks to local waterways due to runoff during rainstorms, especially extreme rains. The runoff from the proposed Buc-ee's in Mebane, North Carolina, could affect Jordan Lake, a local reservoir that supplies drinking water, as well as the Haw River watershed it is a part of.

Mega gas stations and other development projects often turn farmland or wooded areas into largely or partly impervious surfaces, which means that during major storms, the water runs off those areas and into local waterways, carrying with it sediment, trash, and any pollutants present on the site. The effects of stormwater runoff are known to disproportionately impact low-income communities and should be considered in any proposal process.<sup>15</sup>

While most states require stormwater runoff permits for developments, these permitting standards are frequently based on outdated estimates for the frequency of major flooding events. For example, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality notes that “stormwater systems are usually designed to carry the largest storm that would be expected over 10 or 25 years based on historical rainfall data. However, with the current frequency of Hurricanes and Tropical Storms, the historical data no longer accurately reflects the size of storm events going forward.”<sup>16</sup> Due to climate change, one study finds floods that were only likely every hundred years based on past data (known as “hundred-year floods”) could start to happen as frequently as every year by 2100.<sup>17</sup>

While the Buc-ee's planned for Mebane includes blueprints for stormwater retention ponds on the site, these ponds

are only sufficient during ten- or twenty-five-year floods according to North Carolina regulations, an issue that was raised by multiple residents during the city council meeting concerning the proposal.<sup>18</sup> The development would turn a piece of farmland into an area that is 46 percent impervious, causing risks during the yearslong building project as well as ongoing risks as flooding becomes more extreme everywhere.<sup>19</sup>

The Haw River Assembly's Riverkeeper in Alamance County also points out that regulation of runoff is not well enforced. “Due to lack of enforcement, Alamance County has consistently seen sites without permits or submitted stormwater plans, without basic sediment control measures and with sites releasing sediment into streams throughout the entire construction process,” the organization wrote in a 2023 report.<sup>20</sup> The organization's yearlong study found twenty-two sites of preventable pollution from runoff in Alamance, and closely documented seven cases in which pollution went unmitigated even though it likely violated existing regulations.

The risks to our rivers, creeks, streams, lakes, and reservoirs are real, and they are cumulative as development increases in a given area. In 2024 alone, North Carolina added four hundred miles of waterways to its list of “impaired waters” submitted yearly to the US Environmental Protection Agency.<sup>21</sup> Dozens of these impaired water areas are in the Haw River Cape Fear Water Basin. Mega gas stations add another potential source for these impairments to healthy waterways, on which millions of North Carolinians depend for drinking water and recreation.

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<sup>15</sup> “Stormwater, Health, and Equity,” Prevention Institute, <https://www.preventioninstitute.org/sites/default/files/uploads/Stormwater%20Health%20and%20Equity%20Factsheet%20Feb%2020%202020.pdf>.

<sup>16</sup> “Flooding Guidance,” North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, <https://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/energy-mineral-and-land-resources/stormwater/stormwater-program/flooding-guidance>.

<sup>17</sup> Georgios Boumis, Hamed R. Moftakhari, and Hamid Moradkhani, “Coevolution of Extreme Sea Levels and Sea-Level Rise under Global Warming,” *Earth's Future* 11, no. 7 (July 1, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.1029/2023ef003649>.

<sup>18</sup> “City Council Meeting: January 8, 2024.”

<sup>19</sup> “Citizens Voice (Mostly) Opposition to Buc-ee's at Planning Board Meeting,” Alamance News, December 14, 2023, <https://alamancenews.com/citizens-voice-mostly-opposition-to-buc-ees-at-planning-board-meeting/>.

<sup>20</sup> Documenting Sediment Issues in Alamance County: An Impact Report, Haw River Assembly, 2023, based on data assembled here: <https://www.hawriver.org/sediment-pollution>.

<sup>21</sup> Lisa Sorg, “Troubled Waters: DEQ Proposes Adding 400+ Miles of Streams, Rivers to Impaired List,” NC Newsline, March 21, 2024, <https://ncnewsline.com/2024/03/21/troubled-waters-deq-proposes-adding-400-miles-of-streams-rivers-to-impaired-list/>.

## Leaking underground storage tanks

Probably the greatest risk gas stations pose to the water and soil is through underground storage tanks (USTs), which are typically how gasoline is stored on-site before it comes out of the pump. A typical gas station has two or three massive underground storage tanks, each holding twenty to thirty thousand gallons of gas; a Buc-ee's could require ten to twenty times as much capacity to service a much larger amount of pumps.

These tanks are a shockingly common source of leaks due to spills, overfilling, corrosion, and problems at the connection points with pumps. Leaking can occur anywhere in the system including the tanks, seams, and vents.<sup>22</sup> The tanks have a functioning life of only ten to twenty years before they begin to corrode and have to be replaced, and leaking underground storage tanks (LUSTs) often go undetected until after a tank has been decommissioned. Since the federal government began regulating USTs in 1984, the EPA has documented 577,365 releases. With North Carolina's 23,361 active USTs, the state documents hundreds of new releases each year.<sup>23</sup>

The results of even tiny leaks can be catastrophic. According to Beyond Toxics, "A leak as small as 10 gallons of gasoline can contaminate 12 million gallons of drinking water because extremely low amounts of benzene can make water unsafe. Forty-five states have designated LUSTs as a major threat to groundwater quality."<sup>24</sup> A mere pinprick-sized hole in an underground storage tank can leak four hundred gallons of fuel per year.<sup>25</sup> And because of lax regulation and lax

compliance, it is not uncommon for leaks to go a long time before they are discovered.

It's hard to overstate how common leaking USTs are. In a brief search on the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality website, it's possible to identify thirteen known UST leak incidents within less than a mile of the proposed Buc-ee's; five of them, including several high-risk incidents, occurred directly across the street at the Pilot station from 2006 to as recently as 2023.<sup>26</sup> The most recent leak is still pending investigation and potential cleanup by the North Carolina DEQ, and engineers have detected unsafe amounts of benzene and naphthalene in the water and soil on-site.<sup>27</sup>

Once contaminated with benzene, water essentially becomes undrinkable. Soil can also be rendered permanently hazardous by underground petroleum leaks. The soil on sites with leaking underground storage tanks often has to be completely excavated and removed before the site can be safely used for another purpose—and even then, the soil remains contaminated and has to be sequestered in a landfill.<sup>28</sup> And the presence of BTEX contaminants in soil can lead to additional impacts on air quality, as the vapors can permeate through soil and asphalt.<sup>29</sup>

Leaking USTs are also a racial justice issue. A study in South Carolina found that African Americans and low-income people are much more likely to live near a leaking UST; another study shows that mostly Black neighborhoods are more likely to be located near gas stations in general, depleting their property values over time.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Metz and London, "Governing the Gasoline Spigot," 56.

<sup>23</sup> Office of Underground Storage Tanks, Semiannual Report of UST Performance Measures Fiscal Year 2024 (October 01, 2023—September 30, 2024), November 2024, [https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-11/fy2024-eoy-perfmeasreport-2024-11-21\\_0.pdf](https://www.epa.gov/system/files/documents/2024-11/fy2024-eoy-perfmeasreport-2024-11-21_0.pdf); "Learn about Underground Storage Tanks," US Environmental Protection Agency, September 9, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/ust/learn-about-underground-storage-tanks>.

<sup>24</sup> Leavitt et al., *Beneath the Pump*, 8.

<sup>25</sup> Sierra Club, *Leaking Underground Storage Tanks: A Threat to Public Health and Environment*, 2006, 9, <https://www.csu.edu/cerc/documents/LUSTThreattoPublicHealth.pdf>.

<sup>26</sup> North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, "Underground Storage Tank Incidents Map," <https://www.deq.nc.gov/about/divisions/waste-management/science-data-and-reports/gis-maps/underground-storage-tank-incidents-map>.

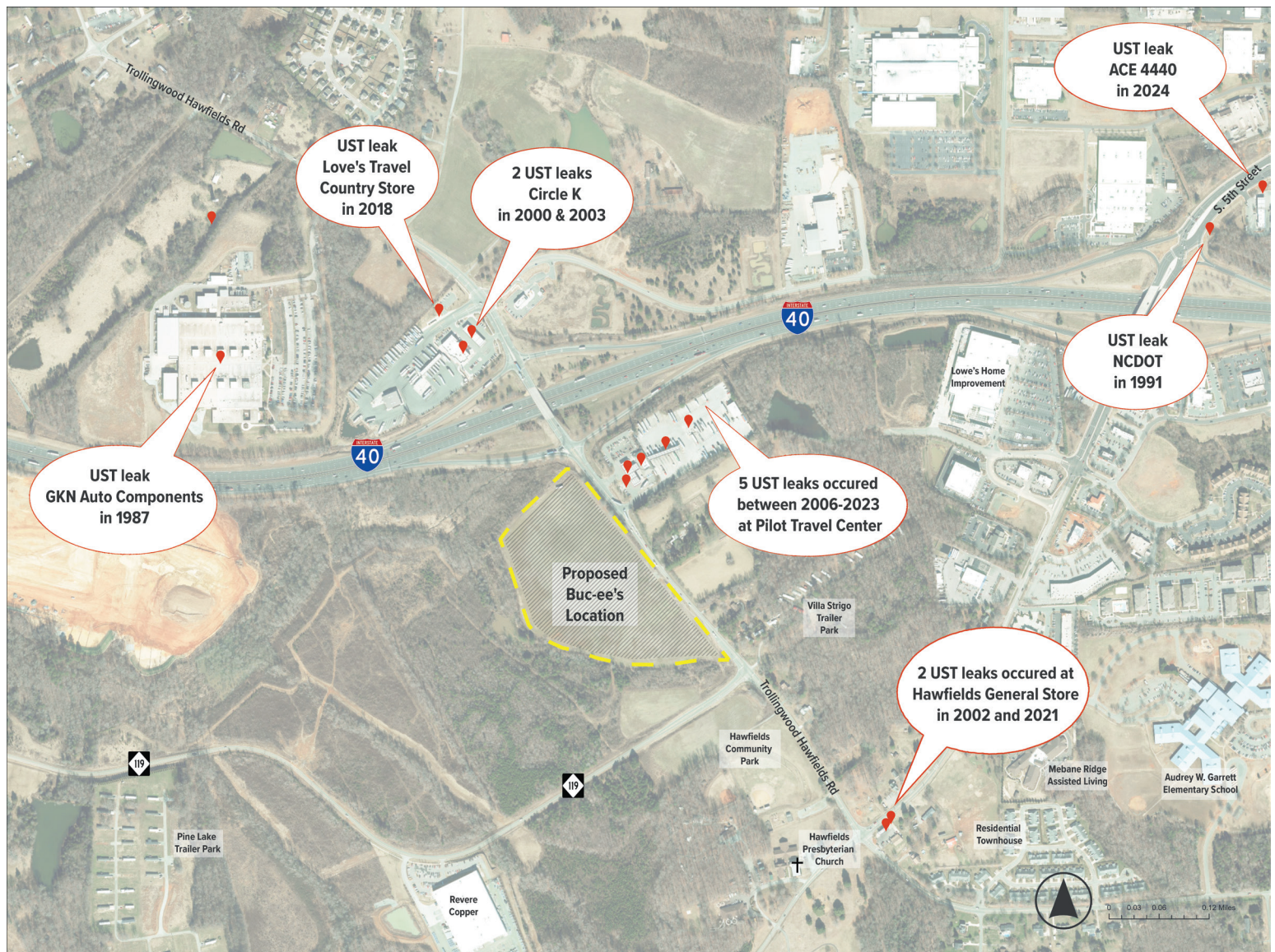
<sup>27</sup> North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality, "Underground Storage Tank Databases and Reports," <https://www.deq.nc.gov/underground-storage-tank-databases-and-reports>.

<sup>28</sup> Leavitt et al., *Beneath the Pump*, 8.

<sup>29</sup> Leavitt et al., *Beneath the Pump*, 9.

<sup>30</sup> Sacoby Wilson et al., "Leaking Underground Storage Tanks and Environmental Injustice: Is There a Hidden and Unequal Threat to Public Health in South Carolina?," *Environmental Justice* 6, no. 5 (October 1, 2013): 175–82, <https://doi.org/10.1089/env.2013.0019>; Andre M. Perry, David Harshbarger, and Jonathan Rothwell, *The Devaluation of Assets in Black Neighborhoods*, Brookings Institution, November 27, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/devaluation-of-assets-in-black-neighborhoods/>.





Leaking Underground Storage Tank reports in the vicinity of the planned Mebane, NC Buc-ee's. Red dots are leaks as reported by NC-DEQ, 1985-2024

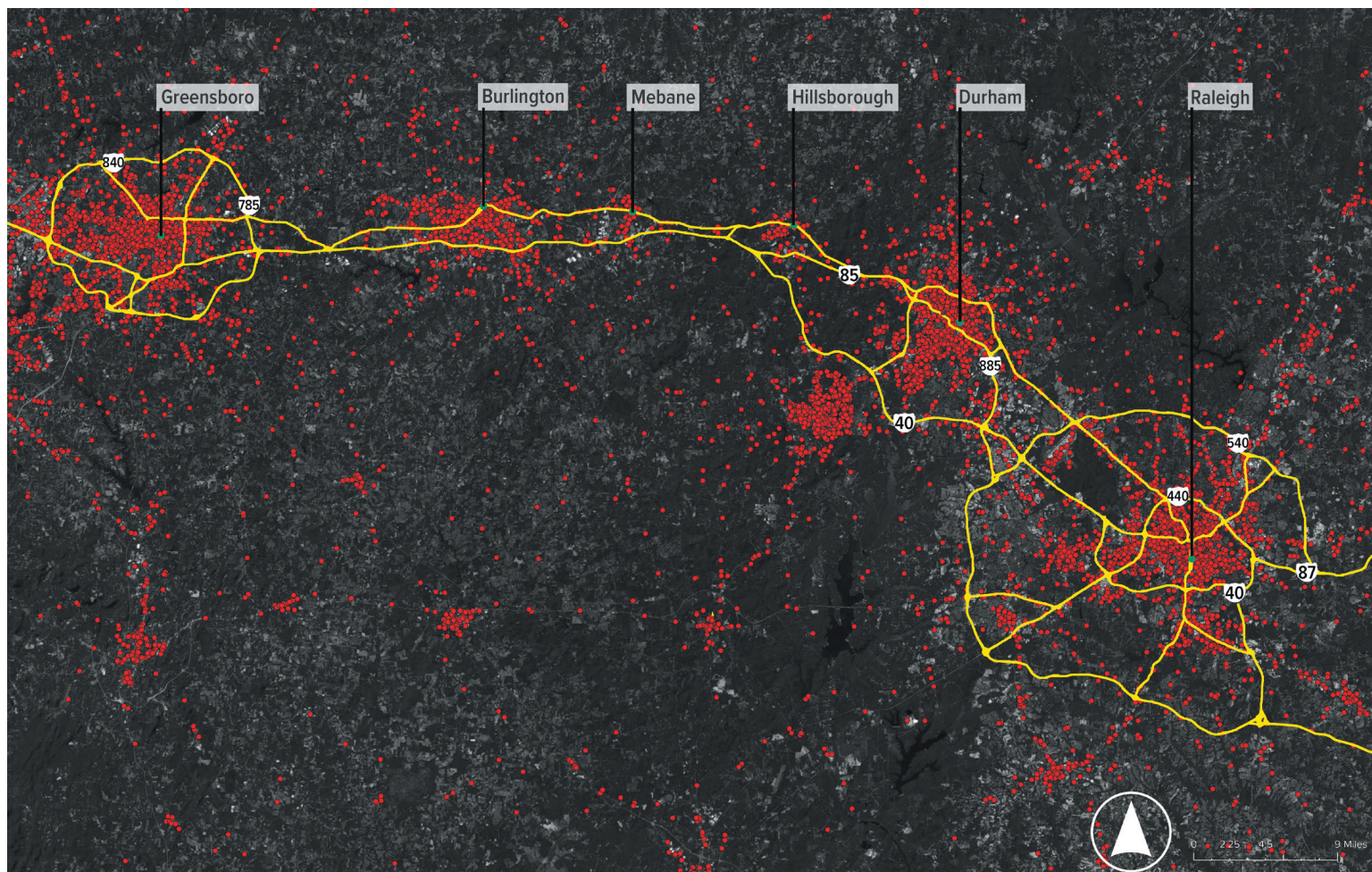
Buc-ee's has told residents that its storage tanks are next-generation and that they have never had a leak. Buc-ee's attorney Stan Beard said to the Mebane City Council, "We've not had a reportable spill in any of our travel centers, so everything that happens at a travel center is handled on-site immediately."<sup>31</sup> This is a misleading statement. A simple search of the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality reveals eight leaking storage tank incidents at seven

different Buc-ee's sites, including two at its recently rebuilt flagship Luling location.<sup>32</sup> That is only looking at one of the states in which Buc-ee's is present. Even the newest, most state-of-the-art tanks can leak due to human error in construction or refueling. The large numbers of tanks and frequency of refueling increases the likelihood that this will happen on any given site.

<sup>31</sup> "City Council Meeting: January 8, 2024."

<sup>32</sup> Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, "TCEQ CR Query—Leaking Petroleum Storage Tanks Remediation ID Number 121950," [https://www15.tceq.texas.gov/crpub/index.cfm?fuseaction=iwr.cordetail&addn\\_id=123461512025002&re\\_id=135332782003092](https://www15.tceq.texas.gov/crpub/index.cfm?fuseaction=iwr.cordetail&addn_id=123461512025002&re_id=135332782003092), retrieved March 10, 2025; Texas Commission on Environmental Quality, "Leaking Petroleum Storage Tank Cleanups," [https://www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation/pst\\_rp](https://www.tceq.texas.gov/remediation/pst_rp).





*Leaking Underground Storage Tank reports across major NC Highways. Red dots are leaks as reported by NC-DEQ, 1980-2024*

## Mega gas stations are subject to lax regulation

Underground storage tanks have become significantly better regulated since the federal government first created standards for them in 1984—but they can still leak during refilling, due to human error, and after corrosion over time. And because they generally require physical inspection in order to find leaks, most UST leaks are not discovered until the tanks are taken out of service.<sup>33</sup> As Matthew N. Metz and Janelle London wrote in the *Environmental Law Reporter* in 2021, “while regulations instituted in the 1980s and 1990s reduced some sources of gas station pollution, gas stations have continued to pollute the air, soil, and water.”<sup>34</sup>

Enforcement is also lax. While the federal government provides guidelines, it is states that actually enforce UST regulation—and only nineteen states inspect USTs at least

once every three years. States largely depend on companies to self-report leaks; very few states mandate yearly inspections. In addition, almost all of the states (forty-six) told the Sierra Club they need more resources for enforcement.<sup>35</sup>

Leaks in underground storage tanks happen not just because of age and corrosion, but because of spotty compliance with existing federal rules. In the second half of 2024, the federal government was regulating 534,740 underground storage tanks, and found that only 60 percent of those were in compliance with federal standards for protection from spills, corrosion, and releases. In North Carolina, only 55 percent of the facilities inspected were in compliance with federal standards.<sup>36</sup>

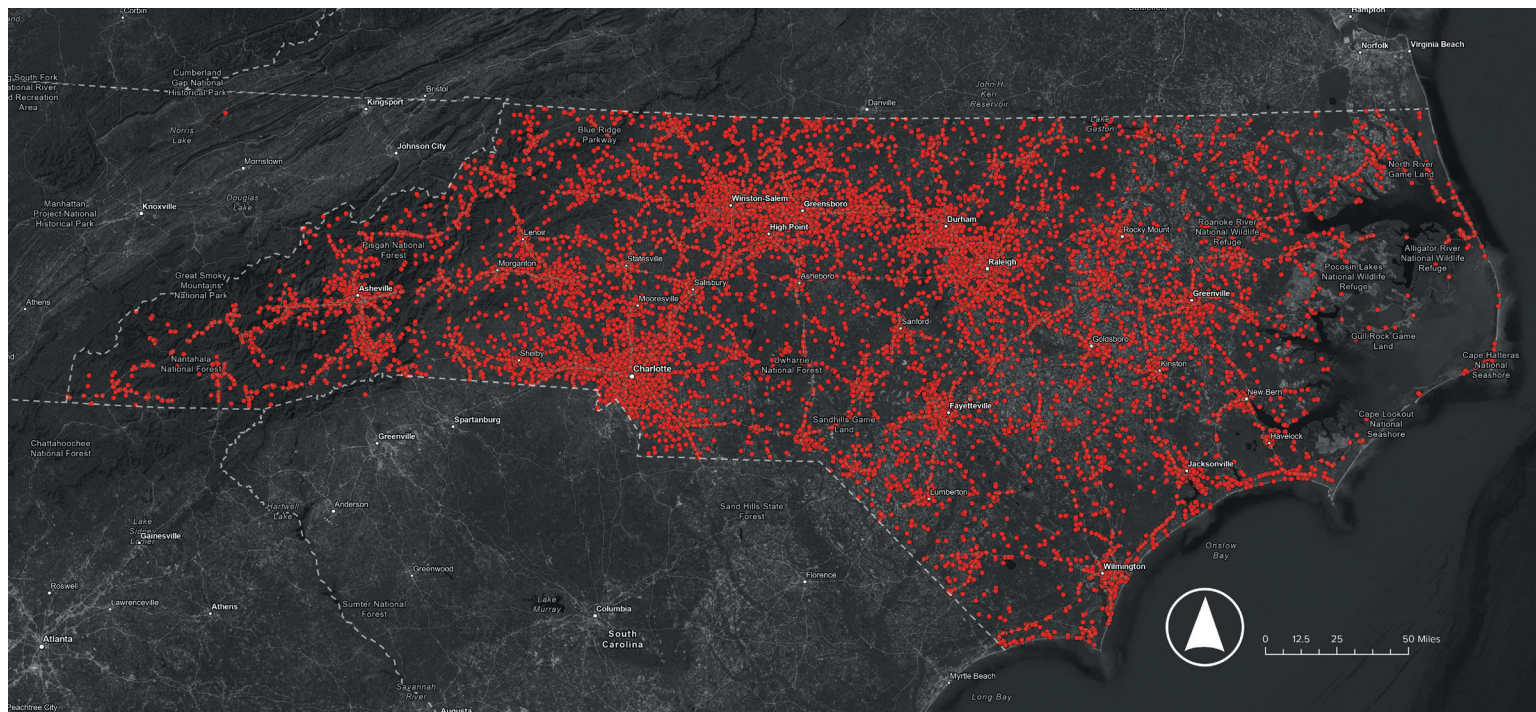
<sup>33</sup> Sierra Club, *Leaking Underground Storage Tanks*, 10.

<sup>34</sup> Metz and London, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot,” 1.

<sup>35</sup> Sierra Club, *Leaking Underground Storage Tanks*, 10.

<sup>36</sup> Office of Underground Storage Tanks, *Semiannual Report*.





*Leaking Underground Storage Tank reports across North Carolina. Red dots are leaks as reported by NC-DEQ, 1975-2024*

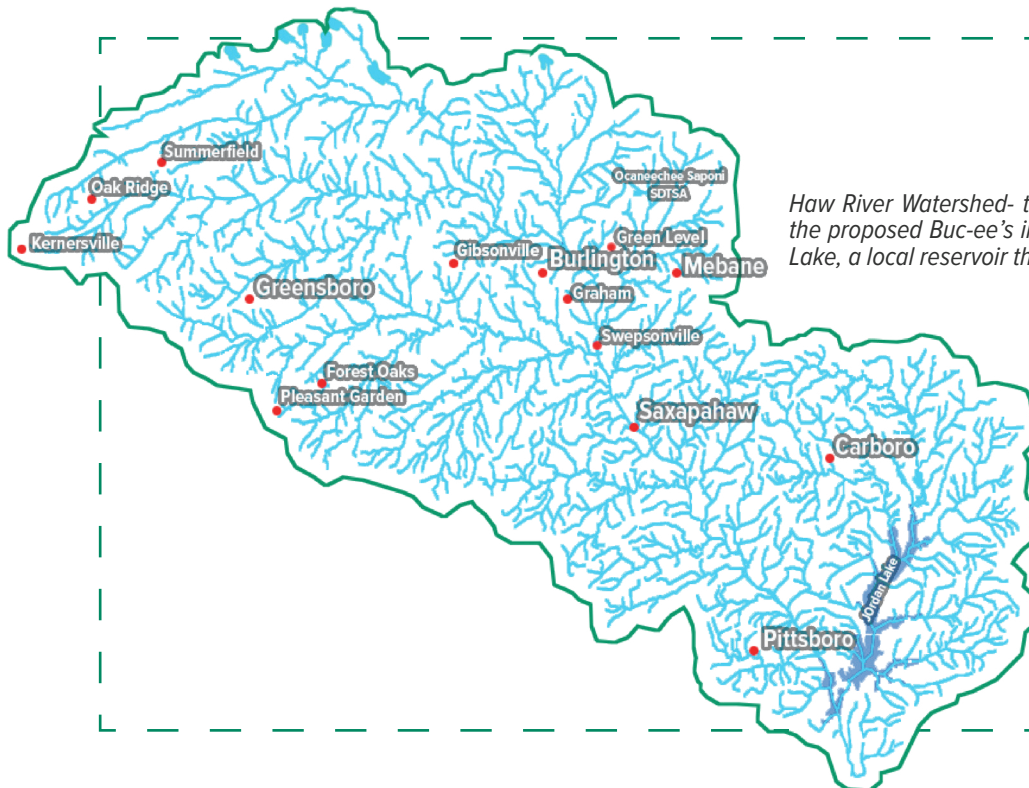
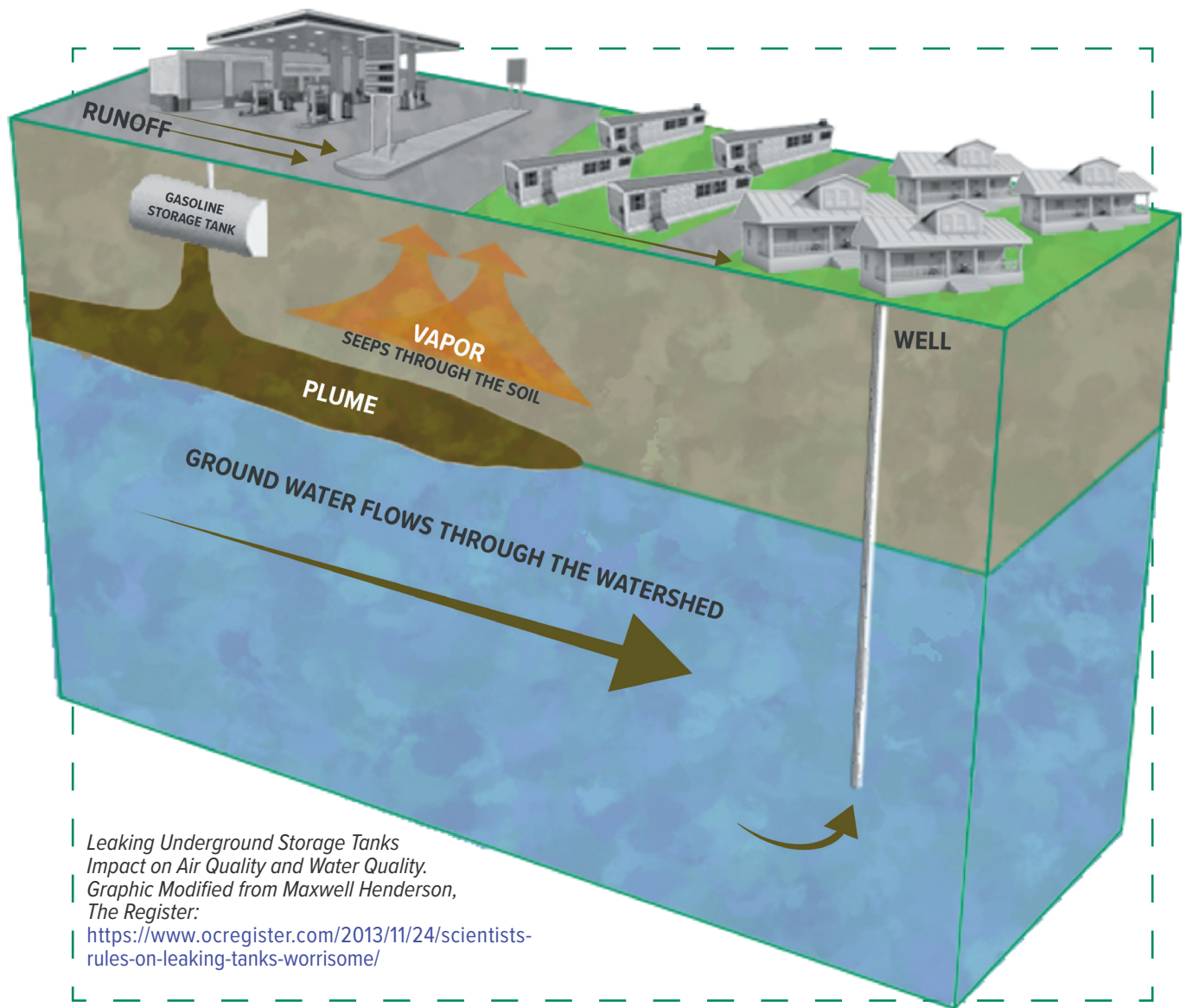
Even when leaks are discovered, they are also frequently never cleaned up because of a convoluted insurance system that allows companies to avoid paying for cleanups out of pocket. And most cleanup prioritization systems are “risk-based,” which means the site is cleaned up only to the extent that it poses an immediate risk to humans. Plants and wildlife, and potential future uses of the site, are not taken into consideration. While each state regulates this differently, there remains a backlog of cleanups in almost every state. For more on the cost of these cleanups, see “Who pays the bill for leaking gas? Not the company: the taxpayers.”

### Zoning laws don't account for mega gas stations

In addition to lax regulation of the toxic risks of USTs, gas stations in general are not strictly regulated. The decision about whether and where a gas station can be placed in a community is generally subject to that community's zoning laws, so long as they comply with relatively forgiving federal regulations that pertain to runoff and waterways and underground storage tanks. In some parts of the country, unincorporated areas have few to no zoning rules at all. In most regulated areas, the zoning laws only account for where gas station–convenience stores may be placed that assume a standard size.

When it comes to health and the environment, few localities have their own additional protective criteria for the placement of gas stations, and even fewer have protective criteria that account for the massive size of a Buc-ee's. If they are within zoning rules (or receive a conditional use permit, as the Buc-ee's in Mebane did), and they follow federal and state environmental regulations or say they are going to, mega gas station projects can't necessarily be prevented from going forward on the basis of community concerns, even serious public health concerns, because there is no applicable law.

Often the only recourse local communities have is to build political power to block a rezoning or permitting process from going forward—or, if a mega gas station leaves pollution behind, to sue after the fact. The other option is to pass new zoning laws that ban gas stations, or ban gas stations above a certain size or within a certain distance from homes, schools, waterways, and so on. As you will see below, more and more municipalities are choosing to take this proactive step.



Haw River Watershed- through which the runoff from the proposed Buc-ee's in Mebane could affect Jordan Lake, a local reservoir that supplies drinking water



## America's abandoned gas station problem

Abandoned gas station projects are already blighting some of the most vulnerable US communities. This is another potential cost for the community to bear: when a gas station site is left behind and contamination is discovered later, there is often little accountability for the companies responsible for the contamination. Today, approximately half of the 450,000 brownfield sites in the US are abandoned and contaminated gas station projects, according to the EPA.<sup>37</sup> As gas-powered vehicles are increasingly decommissioned in favor of electric vehicles, it is likely that even more fueling stations will be obsolete within a few decades. Communities where mega gas stations are now opening, like Mebane, North Carolina, could become contamination sites within a generation. The current federal administration's plans to slash the budget of the EPA could compound the problem, making it less likely that polluted sites will be cleaned up or even identified.<sup>38</sup>



Abandoned gas stations in rural Orange County. Photo courtesy of Iximché Media

## Cancer and the theft of Community health

Cancer-causing chemicals like benzene are dangerous, especially to children and parents, even in small amounts. Living near a gas station increases the risk of leukemia, and living near a mega gas station has yet to be studied.<sup>39</sup> Working at a gas station, or even simply visiting one, can increase exposure to benzene vapors.

One study found that children living near gas stations or auto shops are four times more likely to develop leukemia than children who did not live near these establishments.<sup>40</sup> Benzene exposure through vapors or in drinking water has been associated with childhood leukemia, and, in adults, lung cancer, acute myeloid leukemia, acute lymphocytic leukemia, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, and other blood-related cancers (such as multiple myeloma and non-Hodgkin lymphoma), according to the American Cancer Society and the CDC.<sup>41</sup>

These known damages to community health are traumatic and costly, leaving the most vulnerable residents holding the bag while mega gas stations profit.



<sup>37</sup> "Petroleum Brownfields," US Environmental Protection Agency, February 13, 2025, <https://www.epa.gov/ust/petroleum-brownfields>.

<sup>38</sup> Lylla Younes, "Trump's Push for 'Efficiency' May Destroy the EPA. What Does That Mean for You?," Grist, February 12, 2025, <https://grist.org/regulation/donald-trump-efficiency-epa-lee-zeldin/>.

<sup>39</sup> Metz and London, "Governing the Gasoline Spigot," 8; see also C. Steffen et al., "Acute Childhood Leukaemia and Environmental Exposure to Potential Sources of Benzene and Other Hydrocarbons; a Case-control Study," *Occupational and Environmental Medicine* 61, no. 9 (August 18, 2004): 773–78, <https://doi.org/10.1136/oem.2003.010868>; and Infante, "Residential Proximity to Gasoline Stations and Risk of Childhood Leukemia."

<sup>40</sup> Sierra Club, *Leaking Underground Storage Tanks*, 7

<sup>41</sup> "Benzene and Cancer Risk," American Cancer Society, <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/chemicals/benzene.html>; "NIOSH Pocket Guide to Chemical Hazards: Benzene," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/npgd0049.html>.

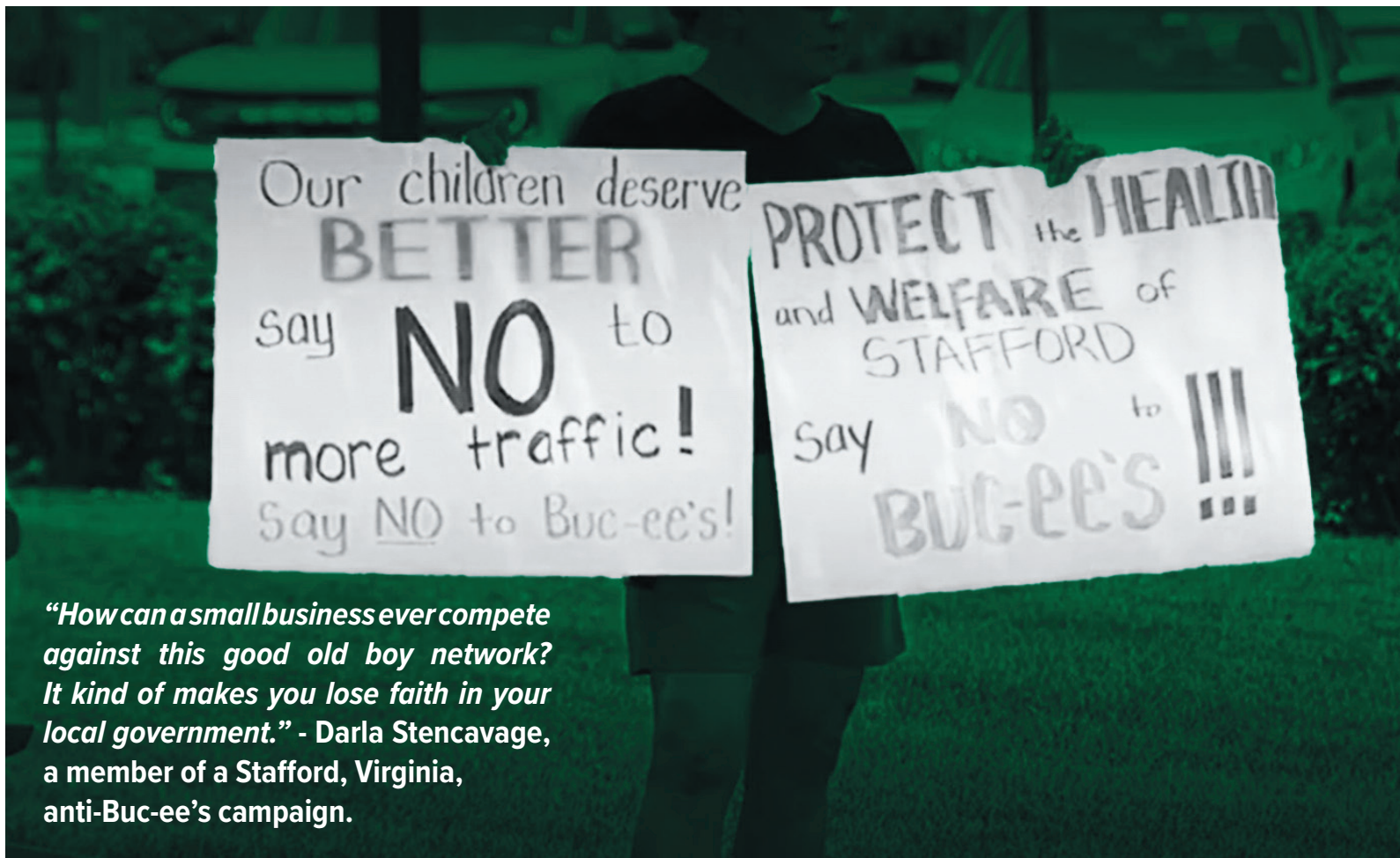


## 02.

# Buc-ee's Is A Local Economic Threat

Buc-ee's touts its ability to contribute jobs and wages to the local economy, add tax money to local coffers, and give marketing opportunities to local makers—an appealing pitch, especially from the perspective of city managers who may expect a bump in tax revenues and, if the city owns the local water systems, sometimes water and utility fees. But gas stations also have negative economic effects on their communities—wearing down infrastructure without fully funding the upgrades, and driving business away from locally owned stops. Generally, Buc-ee's creates a destination for tourists off the freeway, and people stop only to go to Buc-ee's. Moreover, Buc-ee's increasingly comes into areas where gas stations are already at a saturation point, potentially putting other gas stations and convenience stores out of business.

“How can a small business ever compete against this good old boy network?” Darla Stencavage, a member of a Stafford, Virginia, anti-Buc-ee's campaign, said. “It kind of makes you lose faith in your local government.”



***“How can a small business ever compete against this good old boy network? It kind of makes you lose faith in your local government.” - Darla Stencavage, a member of a Stafford, Virginia, anti-Buc-ee's campaign.***

*Image Capture from Fox 5, Washington D.C. “Stafford residents say new Buc-ee's store will bring unwanted traffic.” May 22, 2024*

## The unsustainable promise of “good jobs”

Retail is typically not the most sought-after industry for job creation, because retail jobs are notoriously low-paying and high-turnover. Buc-ee’s claims its Mebane location will bring 225 full-time jobs to the region, with \$15/hour starting wages, benefits, and opportunities for advancement.

This \$15/hour minimum is touted as an accomplishment because it is above what some retailers pay. But the living wage calculation for Alamance County, according to MIT’s Living Wage Calculator, is a minimum of \$20.19/hour (or an annual income around \$42,000) for one adult with no children. And for a single adult with three children, Buc-ee’s wages are described as “poverty wages”; a true living wage would be closer to \$50 an hour.<sup>42</sup> And, as organizers in both Efland and Mebane have pointed out, Alamance County’s unemployment rate is currently so low, it’s unlikely Buc-ee’s will even be filling these jobs with local people.

Critics of Buc-ee’s have also pointed out that the employer is notoriously disliked and low-rated on Indeed.com and Glassdoor, platforms where employees can post anonymously about their jobs. Buc-ee’s rating on Glassdoor comes in at 2.7 stars, behind Family Dollar, Walmart, and Amazon.<sup>43</sup> The company has a notoriously high turnover rate and a very strict dress code, and is known for restricting employee breaks and firing people over minor instances of being late.<sup>44</sup>

Buc-ee’s also asks employees to sign contracts that a Texas court in 2017 likened to “indentured servitude”; Buc-ee’s requires some employees who leave the company in under

five years to pay back their training wages, essentially charging them for leaving the company and entrapping them in the job.<sup>45</sup> In a case that was eventually resolved in the former employee’s favor, Buc-ee’s sued a former manager after she left the company without paying them out, which constitutes indentured servitude because it is essentially a charge to be allowed to leave the job.<sup>46</sup>

## Gas stations depress home values over time

While gas stations and convenience stores can initially raise property values for nearby homes, the long-term effects are mixed. One study in Texas found that homes located near gas stations were valued at 30 to 50 percent less than homes one to 1.5 miles from a gas station. Proximity to a gas station also correlated with slower appreciation in home values over time, particularly for homes within eight hundred feet of the gas station.<sup>47</sup> Buc-ee’s, as a mega gas station, also brings in dozens more cars per hour than a standard gas station, creating traffic headaches for locals and dominating the landscape; the effects of this on local property values have yet to be assessed.

The likelihood of polluted air and water contamination exacerbates the problem. If a gas station becomes contaminated by leaking underground storage tanks—arguably an even higher likelihood in the case of mega gas stations—home values in the surrounding area can plummet by as much as 12.8 percent.<sup>48</sup> The life of an underground storage tank, at ten to twenty years, is shorter than the standard thirty-year mortgage, and these tanks are highly

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<sup>42</sup> “Living Wage Calculator: Living Wage Calculation for Alamance County, North Carolina,” MIT, <https://livingwage.mit.edu/counties/37001>.

<sup>43</sup> “Buc-ee’s Reviews: 2.7 Stars,” Glassdoor, <https://www.glassdoor.com/Reviews/Buc-ee-s-Reviews-E328092.htm>.

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Denham, “Buc-ee’s Texas-sized Convenience Store with Award-winning Bathrooms Is Expanding,” Washington Post, August 14, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2019/business/bucees-texas-convenience-store-bathrooms/>.

<sup>45</sup> Leiza Dolghih, “Buc-ee’s Repayment Provision in the Employment Agreement Is Declared Unlawful, Likened to Indentured Servitude,” North Texas Legal News, November 3, 2023, <https://northtexaslegalnews.com/2017/11/08/buc-ees-repayment-provision-in-the-employment-agreement-is-declared-unlawful-likened-to-indentured-servitude/>.

<sup>46</sup> Christopher McKinney, “Buc-ee’s Loses Texas Retention Agreement Case,” McKinney Law Firm, P.C., January 11, 2018, <https://www.themckinneylawfirm.com/texasemploymentlawblog/2018/1/11/buc-ees-loses-texas-retention-agreement-case>.

<sup>47</sup> Steven McCord, “The Gas Station Effect,” Locate Alpha Insights, February 7, 2022, <https://www.locatealpha.com/insights/the-gas-station-effect/>.

<sup>48</sup> Leavitt et al., “Beneath the Pump,” 15; see also Jeffrey E. Zabel and Dennis Guignet, “A Hedonic Analysis of the Impact of LUST Sites on House Prices,” *Resource and Energy Economics* 34, no. 4 (May 29, 2012): 549–64, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.reseneeco.2012.05.006>; Thomas Jackson, “The Effects of Environmental Contamination on Real Estate: A Literature Review,” *Journal of Real Estate Literature* 9, no. 2 (January 1, 2001): 91–116, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10835547.2001.12090100>; and Thomas Jackson, “Environmental Contamination and Industrial Real Estate Prices,” *Journal of Real Estate Research* 23, no. 1–2 (January 1, 2002): 179–200, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10835547.2002.12091073>.





Trailer park on Villa Strigo Rd. and Hawfield's Community Park in close proximity to the proposed Buc-ee's location on Tollingwood Hawfields Rd. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media

likely to be a source of contamination particularly near the end of their life cycle.

As we covered in section 1 of this report, about half of existing brownfields in the US are a result of abandoned and contaminated gas station projects. In the case that a gas station is abandoned, leaves contamination behind, and becomes a brownfield, that can lead to significant depreciation of nearby properties. Even simply knowing that a site used to be a gas station can dissuade potential developers, who fear being saddled with a lengthy cleanup process if UST contamination is discovered after the fact.

These costs are rarely accounted for or covered by those selling the gas, even after they close and leave the community in question behind. In their wake: potentially contaminated sites with few prospects for future use, a costly cleanup, and a community that is worse off economically over the long term.

<sup>49</sup> "Petroleum Brownfields," US Environmental Protection Agency, <https://www.epa.gov/ust/petroleum-brownfields>.

<sup>50</sup> Oana Mihaescu and Rainer vom Hofe, "The Impact of Brownfields on Residential Property Values in Cincinnati, Ohio: A Spatial Hedonic Approach," *Journal of Regional Analysis & Policy* 42, no. 3 (223–236), April 24, 2013, <https://ideas.repec.org/p/hhs/huiwps/0085.html>.

## Buc-ee's water use is out of control

Del Ward of A Voice for Orange County—a group that successfully prevented a Buc-ee's from opening in Efland, North Carolina<sup>51</sup>—points out that Buc-ee's is not primarily in the gas business, but in the water business. While the mega gas stations attract customers who shop for food and fuel up at their hundred-plus pumps, they actively advertise themselves as sources of sparkling clean and abundant restrooms. That means the 24-7 facilities are constantly using clean water and producing sewage in large amounts. By way of example, a new Buc-ee's in Huber Heights, Ohio, will use approximately twenty-five thousand gallons of water per day, according to the *Dayton Daily News*.<sup>52</sup> Another Buc-ee's under construction in Boerne, Texas, raised questions from residents about water use, given that Boerne residents are frequently under water restrictions due to extreme drought conditions throughout much of Texas.<sup>53</sup> Locals say the plan for a Boerne Buc-ee's, north of San Antonio in Kendall County, also risks contaminating the area's sensitive



Mebane Water Tower. Photo courtesy of Iximché Media

underground aquifers, which supply drinking water to San Antonio.<sup>54</sup>

The Buc-ee's in Mebane, North Carolina, estimates it will pump an average of twenty-three thousand gallons of water per day, with a similar amount flowing out into the City of Graham wastewater treatment plant.<sup>55</sup>

But activists from A Voice for Orange County previously demonstrated that Buc-ee's water-use estimates are likely dramatically understated.<sup>56</sup> The numbers Buc-ee's provided to city planners in North Carolina were based on average uses for gas stations, not for mega gas stations that advertise their restrooms on billboards. A Voice for Orange County says Buc-ee's real water-use numbers are likely much higher, and the company chooses not to make these accessible during its negotiations for new locations.

Water and sewer access is an equity issue. In many southern cities, including Mebane itself, Black and Brown communities have been the last areas to be hooked up to city water and sewer. Brenda and Omega Wilson started advocating for equity in Mebane's infrastructure development over thirty years ago, in 1994, when the city proposed a highway bypass that would have sliced through West End and White Level, two unincorporated neighborhoods that are home to mostly

Black and Brown residents. Their organization, the West End Revitalization Association, filed a federal lawsuit and won, preventing the city from destroying its Black neighborhoods and leading to a new plan for the highway.<sup>57</sup>

But these same neighborhoods continued to fight for decades to be annexed into the city and receive water and sewer services—and some still do not have it. Meanwhile, Buc-ee's will be adding the equivalent of more than five hundred full-time residents in water use, according to its own estimates. White Level, a nearby area with a population smaller than five hundred, still does not have access to municipal sewer services. West End is adjacent to the city's sewage treatment plant, which is going to be completely rebuilt to accommodate growth in the area.

"There are other Black communities around Mebane with failed septic tanks that still aren't connected to the city services," said Omega Wilson.

While in the short term, a new Buc-ee's location may provide an influx of revenue for cities and towns that own their own water systems, the company's water use should raise concerns for locals, particularly in areas with frequent drought or sensitive drinking-water sources.

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<sup>51</sup> A Voice for Orange County, Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/voice4orange/>.

<sup>52</sup> Jessica Orozco and Aimee Hancock, "Buc-ee's Agreement: Lawsuit Dropped over Water Service at Huber Heights Location," Dayton Daily News, December 11, 2024, <https://www.daytondailynews.com/local/bucc-ees-agreement-lawsuit-dropped-over-water-service-at-huber-heights-location/CE7SW4BDVRA5HJTROD5VRRXGDM/>.

<sup>53</sup> "10+ Reasons Buc-ee's Is Wrong for Boerne," Change.org, April 16, 2023, <https://www.change.org/p/10-reasons-buc-ee-s-is-wrong-for-boerne>; University of Nebraska—Lincoln, "U.S. Drought Monitor," [https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?fips\\_48259](https://droughtmonitor.unl.edu/CurrentMap/StateDroughtMonitor.aspx?fips_48259).

<sup>54</sup> Shari Biediger, "Buc-ee's Bound for Boerne after Years of Roadwork and Other Delays," San Antonio Report, October 11, 2023, <https://sanantonioreport.org/buc-ees-bound-for-boerne-after-years-of-roadwork-and-other-delays>.

<sup>55</sup> "City Council Meeting: January 8, 2024."

<sup>56</sup> A Voice for Orange County, "If Buc-ee's wants to be such a 'good corporate neighbor' why are they hiding their water usage data from OC residents?," Instagram, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CJ9uOJvnDTM/>.

<sup>57</sup> "Our History," West End Revitalization Association, July 21, 2021, <https://weranc.org/our-history/>.



# 03.

## Mega Gas Stations' Cost To Taxpayers

Buc-ee's maintains that its presence benefits communities by bringing jobs, but it also extracts subsidies and government assistance from some of the places where the company opens new locations. This is a lose-lose for taxpayers: normally, companies that seek subsidies from local and state governments do so because they are bringing competitive jobs in sectors like manufacturing or technology, which could theoretically be placed anywhere with the real estate. Buc-ee's is different: the company selects its locations based on interstate highway traffic, and eagerly pursues specific plots of land that are inexpensive and accessible to highways. For Buc-ee's, a low-regulation, rural environment is in many ways ideal; rural locations expending taxpayer dollars or forgoing future tax payments are not likely savvy choices.

The Good Jobs First Subsidy Tracker counts at least thirteen cases in which the company has gotten publicly funded grants in the state of Texas,<sup>58</sup> many in the form of so-called 380 agreements, named for a provision of Texas law that authorizes local governments to offer loans and grants of city funds or services at little or no cost to companies to promote economic development. Buc-ee's has also benefited from tax breaks such as Opportunity Zones, New Market Tax Credits, and sales tax rebates.

Kasia Tarczynska at Good Jobs First says not all of Buc-ee's subsidies nationally will show up in the tracker, because the database only includes data from each state's five largest cities and the largest new development projects. Different states and local development authorities use different mechanisms for subsidies including sales tax abatement, property tax abatement, tax rebates, tax-increment financing zones, and grants. So, for each new proposed project, a thorough search of meeting notes or even a public records

request may be necessary to identify subsidies, which are not always obvious to the taxpayers footing the bill.

Mebane's city leaders have said the company didn't get any city or county economic development incentives for that location. But it did effectively get subsidies from city and county taxpayers, since it bought land that was part of a state economic development zone known as the North Carolina Commerce Park, where the infrastructure was subsidized by three local governments as well as the state. The park cost \$12 million to taxpayers from Mebane, Alamance County, and the City of Graham, and an additional \$100,000 to get the site certified by the state as an economic development zone. That \$12 million, which has already been spent, created the infrastructure (water, power, sewer, and roads) on which Buc-ee's will depend when it does open.<sup>59</sup>

In addition, in public meetings the company promised—and Mebane leadership assured residents—that it would pay for 100 percent of the modifications that will be necessary to the highway interchange to make the giant new complex accessible. However, after Buc-ee's submitted its plans and promised to foot the cost, the state Department of Transportation announced that the interchange will be entirely redone at a cost of \$38.7 million. Buc-ee's will pay only \$10 million of those costs, in a project that will take at least two years to complete.<sup>60</sup> The process by which this division of funds was determined is not transparent to the public.

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<sup>58</sup> "Subsidy Tracker," Good Jobs First, [https://subsidytracker.goodjobsfirst.org/summary.php?company\\_op=starts&company=Buc-ee%27s&subsidy\\_op=%3E&face\\_loan\\_op=%3E](https://subsidytracker.goodjobsfirst.org/summary.php?company_op=starts&company=Buc-ee%27s&subsidy_op=%3E&face_loan_op=%3E).

<sup>59</sup> "City Council Meeting: January 8, 2024."

<sup>60</sup> Tammy Grubb, "Buc-ee's Will Bring People and Change to Mebane. Here Are 6 Things to Know in 2025," Durham Herald Sun, January 2, 2025, [https://www.heraldsun.com/news/business/article297345544.html#campaignName=durham\\_morning\\_newsletter](https://www.heraldsun.com/news/business/article297345544.html#campaignName=durham_morning_newsletter).

## Who pays the bill for leaking gas? Not the company: **THE TAXPAYERS**

As we saw in section 1 of this report, leaking underground storage tanks are a common environmental hazard associated with gas station projects. What's more, these leaks are frequently left to linger and not cleaned up for years, if at all. The organization Coltura tracks these cleanups and reported in early 2025 that there was a backlog of 63,677 leaks yet to be cleaned up in the United States.<sup>61</sup>

Mega gas stations like Buc-ee's have not yet been tested for how their storage tanks perform over time, how much contamination results, and what happens when these sites are abandoned.

Whatever the size and scope, underground storage tank cleanups are another way in which taxpayers subsidize gas stations. Cleaning up a UST site can cost between tens of thousands and several million dollars.<sup>62</sup>

Under federal law, the company that owns the property at the time of a leak is responsible for the cleanup. However, the cleanups are paid for through a system of insurance—and thirty-six states, including North Carolina, provide that insurance to companies directly through a trust fund that is supported by motor excise fees, federal grants, and payments made by gas station operators. Companies pay an annual fee per tank, and are responsible for a deductible in the case of a cleanup; after that, the trust fund is responsible for the cleanup costs.<sup>63</sup> The remainder of the cost beyond the company's deductible is paid in full by the state, a benefit that is touted by companies that provide cleanup services.<sup>64</sup>

Simultaneously, many state funds are underfunded, or state

legislatures can decide not to release sufficient funds to complete cleanups. That means that not only are taxpayers helping subsidize the cleanup through taxes and fees, but that cleanups are still not guaranteed to happen. In 2016, Lisa Sorg reported for the Coastal Review that North Carolina had a backlog of five thousand cleanups, which would cost some \$800 million to complete—but the state was releasing only \$30 million per year from the fund.<sup>65</sup> To make up for the shortfall, the North Carolina Department of Environmental Quality began limiting the number of cleanups based on “risk-based standards,” meaning that contamination that doesn't meet certain criteria for risk to human health may never be cleaned up at all. As one EPA representative said, the principle is “How much of the [BTEX] compounds of concern can we safely leave in place?”<sup>66</sup>

Limiting cleanups also effectively acts as a subsidy for gas stations, allowing them to avoid paying the full cost of their environmental risk, as Matthew Metz and Janelle London argue in their 2021 Environmental Law Institute article, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot: Gas Stations and the Transition Away from Gasoline.”

“In some cases, cleanup is so expensive that the gas station owner/operator determines the investment in cleanup will take too long to be recouped and instead delays cleanup, sells, or abandons the gas station,” Metz and London write.<sup>67</sup>

Whether taxpayers foot the bill for the cleanups, or the cleanups are never conducted, people who live near leaking underground storage tanks can live with their consequences for years, decades, or indefinitely.

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<sup>61</sup> Metz and London, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot”

<sup>62</sup> Leavitt et al., “Beneath the Pump,” 10.

<sup>63</sup> “Glossary of Terms,” North Carolina General Assembly, <https://webservices.ncleg.gov/ViewDocSiteFile/21033>.

<sup>64</sup> “Leaking UST (Underground Storage Tank)?,” East Coast Environmental, <https://eastcoastenv.com/ust-trust-fund/>.

<sup>65</sup> Lisa Sorg, “Little Money for Leaking Underground Tanks,” Coastal Review, July 11, 2016, <https://coastalreview.org/2016/07/15371/>.

<sup>66</sup> Leavitt et al., “Beneath the Pump,” 11

<sup>67</sup> Metz and London, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot.”

# 04.

## Buc-ee's Owners Flex Their Political Muscle

Buc-ee's cofounders, Arch "Beaver" Aplin III and Don Wasek, are wealthy political donors, reportedly giving millions in donations to Republican PACs and candidates. In 2024 alone, Aplin gave \$755,000 to conservative candidates in Texas, including \$500,000 to Governor Greg Abbott and \$75,000 to Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick for their reelection campaigns. According to a public records database available through Transparency USA, Aplin has made \$3.1 million in political contributions to Texas Republicans since 2015.<sup>68</sup> Wasek has given \$1.4 million since 2015, focusing his largest donations on Attorney General Ken Paxton and Agriculture Commissioner Sid Miller.<sup>69</sup>

Both have also begun donating to conservatives beyond Texas, with Aplin giving \$100,000 to Florida Governor Ron DeSantis's campaign in 2022 and \$50,000 to Virginia Governor Glenn Youngkin in 2023. In 2022, the year Buc-ee's opened its first South Carolina location, Aplin also donated to South Carolina's governor and Speaker of the House.<sup>70</sup> In addition to focusing on far-right conservatives, the pair seems to be focused on the states in which the company is aggressively expanding: Governor DeSantis announced plans for Buc-ee's third Florida location in 2023, along with a \$4 million grant from the governor's office to support updating the highway interchange,<sup>71</sup> and Buc-ee's is also eyeing four separate locations in Virginia.<sup>72</sup>

Although their donations partially follow a pattern of many business owners—giving to states in which they have a

presence—they also belie a political agenda, as Aplin and Wasek's attempts at political sway are almost entirely absent in the Democratic-run or purple states where Buc-ee's is expanding, such as North Carolina and Colorado. (Aplin did make a foray into North Carolina politics in 2024, when he donated \$6,400—the maximum allowed under law at the time—to the campaign of Republican Rep. Jason Saine, who served on a lot of key committees, including Commerce. Saine resigned in August and now works as a lobbyist with the Southern Group, where he represents numerous corporate interests and local governments.)

Their conservative agenda connects them to outright white supremacists. According to OpenSecrets, Wasek has contributed \$100,000 to an überconservative PAC called Texans United for a Conservative Majority, which was started by West Texas oil billionaires Tim Dunn and Farris Wilks after they were tied to white supremacists. That PAC is so far to the right that it went after Texas House Republicans who voted to impeach Attorney General Ken Paxton over accusations of inappropriate favors to donors, interference in federal investigations, and retaliation against whistleblowers.<sup>73</sup>

The Buc-ee's corporation itself has also made significant political donations, totaling \$247,835 since 1990 and \$23,259 in 2024 alone. In 2024, 90 percent of the company's congressional campaign donations went to Republicans, as did 74 percent of its donations to federal political campaigns.<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> "Arch Aplin III—Texas Contributor—Transparency USA," Transparency USA, <https://www.transparencyusa.org/tx/contributor/arch-aplin-iii>.

<sup>69</sup> "Donald Wasek—Texas Contributor—Transparency USA," Transparency USA, <https://www.transparencyusa.org/tx/contributor/don-wasek?cycle=2015-to-now>.

<sup>70</sup> "Arch Aplin III," OpenSecrets Donor Lookup, [https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup/results?name=aplin+iii%2C+arch+h&order=desc&page=1&sort=D; Lyn Riddle, "SC May Get Another Buc-ee's. This Interstate Needs at Least \\$60M in Improvements First," State, January 30, 2024, https://www.thestate.com/news/state/south-carolina/article284660040.html](https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup/results?name=aplin+iii%2C+arch+h&order=desc&page=1&sort=D; Lyn Riddle, ).

<sup>71</sup> Katlyn Fernandez, "3rd Buc-ee's Location to Open in Florida," News Channel 8, April 7, 2023, <https://www.wfla.com/news/florida/3rd-buc-ees-location-to-open-in-florida/>.

<sup>72</sup> Eric Bleeker, "15 Cities Buc-ee's Stores Are Headed to Next," 24-7 Wall Street, October 31, 2023, <https://247wallst.com/special-report/2023/10/31/15-cities-buc-ees-stores-are-headed-to-next-virginia-colorado-wisconsin-beyond/>.

<sup>73</sup> Stella M. Chavez, "West Texas Billionaires Back Candidates Opposing House Republicans Who Supported Paxton Impeachment," KERA, February 26, 2024, <https://www.keranews.org/news/2024-02-26/west-texas-billionaires-back-candidates-opposing-house-republicans-who-supported-paxton-impeachment>.

<sup>74</sup> "Buc-ee's Summary," OpenSecrets Donor Lookup, <https://www.opensecrets.org/orgs/buc-ee-s/summary?toprecipcycle=2024&contribcycle=2024&lobcycle=2024&outspendcycle=2024&id=D000088337&topnumcycle=A>.



# 05.

## The Organized Opposition

### Strategy: Local neighbor organizing

#### A Voice for Orange County

In 2020, when Buc-ee's announced its intention to open a location off of I-40/85 in rural Efland, North Carolina, a group of residents in the unincorporated Orange County town organized to try to stop it. A Voice for Orange County (originally A Voice for Efland) used social media to raise awareness, and rallied a mix of locals to show up at county commission and zoning board meetings in opposition. They held informational meetings, helped neighbors understand zoning laws and what power they had to stop the Buc-ee's, and did independent research on Buc-ee's water use, traffic congestion, employment practices, and potential for contaminating air and groundwater. After elected representatives in Orange County pushed for a Buc-ee's with a smaller footprint, the company pulled out of its Efland plans in 2021—representing the first successful anti-Buc-ee's campaign in the country.



Image courtesy of A Voice for Orange County

Buc-ee's returned to Orange and neighboring Alamance Counties a few years later with a proposal for a much larger location just a few miles up the road in Mebane—demonstrating that the rural communities where it tries to land are essentially interchangeable, so long as they go along with Buc-ee's vision.

### Strategy: Indigenous land rights

#### 7 Directions of Service

In Mebane, North Carolina, the Buc-ee's has been opposed by a powerful coalition of individuals and organizations including air and water experts, neighbors and landowners, and an Indigenous-led environmental justice organization, 7 Directions of Service, that is based in Alamance County near where the massive development has been proposed.<sup>77</sup> Notably, the Buc-ee's planned for Mebane would cover up part of a historic Occaneechi trading path that was placed on the World Monuments Fund's watch list in 2025. As the World Monuments Watch page explains, "The Great Trading Path was an important route of cross-cultural exchange and connection for Indigenous communities in the past and is a vital anchor of identity for their descendants in the present. Also known as the Occaneechi Path, the trail allowed the flow of people, goods, and ideas across the American Southeast for hundreds of years."<sup>78</sup>

7 Directions of Service has worked to map the path, document its history, and connect the Great Trading Path to the fight against Buc-ee's. While Mebane's city council went against zoning board recommendations in approving Buc-ee's rezoning request in 2024, the struggle continues—and the organizing drew together key arguments against Buc-ee's, including its long-term legacy as an expansion of an unsustainable fossil fuel economy.

<sup>77</sup> "Protect the Great Trading Path," 7 Directions of Service, <https://7directionsofservice.com/great-trading-path>.

<sup>78</sup> "The Great Trading Path, United States," World Monuments Fund, <https://www.wmf.org/monuments/the-great-trading-path-united-states>.





*Established in the 1780's, the Hawfields Presbyterian Church Cemetery, sits on the historic route of the Great Occaneechi Trading Path. This site is a little over half a mile from the future Buc-ee's site. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media*

## Strategy: Gas station moratoriums

### Zoning ordinances passed around the country

In 2021, Petaluma, California, became the first local government in the US to ban the construction of new gas stations. At fifteen square miles, the northern California city already had sixteen gas stations.<sup>79</sup> Anticipating a ban on new gas-powered vehicles that will go into effect in California in 2035, the residents of Petaluma decided to proactively stop any further gas station construction by restricting the city's zoning.

Almost all US cities have zoning laws that make mention of gas stations. As the Stand.earth SAFE Cities campaign argues, residents can proactively prevent new construction of fossil fuel infrastructure by updating their zoning ordinances—either banning new gas stations and other fossil fuel infrastructure altogether, or proposing restrictive safety and health setbacks that would make it so no future residents have to live on top of toxic infrastructure.<sup>80</sup> After Petaluma, many other cities began exploring their options. Even Los Angeles banned new gas stations in 2022, and in 2024 Denver passed new restrictions on gas station density, stopping several planned gas station projects in their tracks.<sup>81</sup>

### Beyond Toxics' research and advocacy

Beyond Toxics is an Oregon-based environmental justice organization that has advocated for a moratorium on new gas stations in Eugene, Oregon, via zoning policies.<sup>82</sup> The organization conducted extensive research and mapping about the concentration of gas stations in Eugene, their potential health effects on surrounding communities, and the many environmental and health arguments against gas stations in general (Buc-ee's and the mega gas station trend have not yet made it to the West Coast). While the moratorium has not yet passed in Eugene, Beyond Toxics' work helps residents begin to actively envision a fossil-free future and provides tools for people all over the country concerned about gas station toxicity.<sup>83</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Vanessa Arrendondo, "Petaluma Bans All New Gas Stations in Push to Curb Emissions," San Francisco Chronicle, March 2, 2021, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/local/article/Petaluma-bans-all-new-gas-station-in-push-to-curb-15994840.php>.

<sup>80</sup> "SAFE Cities: Protection from Fossil Fuel Infrastructure," Stand.earth, <https://www.safecities.earth/what/protection/>.

<sup>81</sup> Nathan Taft, "Cities Are Banning New Gas Stations. More Should Join Them," Guardian, June 21, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2022/jun/21/gas-stations-us-cities-fuel-prices>; Jasmine Arenas, "New Denver Ordinance Limiting New Gas Station Construction Passes," CBS News, February 20, 2025, <https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/denver-ordinance-limit-new-gas-station-construction/>.

<sup>82</sup> Nathan Wilk, "Eugene City Council Wrestles with Ban on New Gas Stations to Reduce Use of Fossil Fuels," OPB, October 19, 2023, <https://www.opb.org/article/2023/10/19/eugene-gas-station-restriction-city-council/>.

<sup>83</sup> Leavitt et al., "Building a Fossil Free Future."

# 06.

## Tool Kit: Questions And Resources If A Mega Gas Station Is Proposed In Your Community

### Zoning and law

- Who is in charge of planning and zoning on your city or town staff? Introduce yourself and your group to that person—city staff are often useful sources of information about development plans.
- What are your community’s zoning laws? Is zoning and land use determined by the city/town, or the county? Locate the most up-to-date zoning ordinance, sometimes called a development ordinance, and familiarize yourself with it.
- Where are gas stations (often called “service centers” in official documents) currently permitted? Often, you’ll need to look at a “zoning use table” or a similar resource that breaks down the different types of zones and what is permitted in each zone in your area. These tables usually have a key to help you decode them.
- Here is an example of a table from Durham County. In this table, gas stations with a store attached are referred to as “convenience store with gasoline sales” and are limited to five thousand square feet, and gas may also be sold at “vehicle service, minor” locations that offer oil changes and small repairs. [https://udo.durhamnc.gov/udo/5\\_01\\_Use%20Table.htm?Highlight=zoning%20table%235.1.2#5.1.2](https://udo.durhamnc.gov/udo/5_01_Use%20Table.htm?Highlight=zoning%20table%235.1.2#5.1.2).
- Will the proposed service center require a rezoning or a conditional use permit in order to be built?
- What is the current density of gas stations and service centers in your area?
  - You can consult the US Bureau of Labor Statistics for information on gas station density,<sup>84</sup> which may help show that a mega gas station is likely cannibalizing existing companies rather than adding necessary amenities in your area.
- In confrontations with large corporations, they often have lawyers representing their side. If possible, find a lawyer knowledgeable about real estate, zoning, and environmental regulation who can advise your group and even speak on your behalf where appropriate.

### Jobs and taxes

- What is your county or city unemployment rate?
  - In some places where developments argue they are creating jobs, the unemployment rate is already so low that it would appear to be difficult to staff the facility with locals. Is there actually a need for more entry-level jobs in your area? Or do you have the leverage to advocate for higher-paying forms of development?
- What is considered a living wage in your region? Consult MIT’s Living Wage Calculator: <https://livingwage.mit.edu/>
  - Calculate whether Buc-ee’s entry-level jobs will pay a living wage. In most places, this is not the case. Note that management positions are far fewer, and often go to Buc-ee’s employees who are brought in to manage the new location.

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<sup>84</sup> “Kings County, NY, Has the Highest Density of Gas Stations in Second Quarter of 2023,” TED: The Economics Daily, Bureau of Labor Statistics, December 15, 2023, <https://www.bls.gov/opub/ted/2023/kings-county-ny-has-the-highest-density-of-gas-stations-in-second-quarter-of-2023.htm>.

- What taxes do businesses pay in your area? Do they pay sales or property taxes? How much? What cut of those revenues go to local priorities like schools and roads?
  - Keep in mind that in some localities, there is very little tax benefit to bringing in a retail business because its income and sales tax go to state and federal governments, and there is little or no property tax. When the company says it will generate x amount in tax revenue, make sure you understand where that tax revenue is actually going and what it will pay for. Often these are inflated numbers that mostly bypass locals and do not go back into the infrastructure or economic foundations of smaller cities and towns.
- How many jobs is Buc-ee's promising, and how do they compare to other current and potential employers in the region?
- What other businesses offer similar amenities nearby (gas, bathrooms/water, convenience stores, kitschy shops)? Are they concerned about business being drawn away from them?
- What kinds of tax abatements, grants, and subsidies does your county or city economic development authority offer to attract businesses? What about your state? Will this project be receiving any of those incentives?
  - Note that these incentives take multiple forms. Economic development areas, tax abatements, local and state grants, and subsidizing infrastructure and road improvements are all ways taxpayers end up covering corporations' costs. Be vigilant in your inquiries about these different kinds of support for outside corporations: these deals can be made behind closed doors with little local input. Be sure to ask about subsidies, grants, tax abatements, incentives, and any financing from city, county, or state sources.
- You can use Good Jobs First's Subsidy Tracker to search for past incentives in your area (<https://subsidytracker.goodjobsfirst.org/>) or consult Good Jobs First reports that focus on particular cities and states (<https://goodjobsfirst.org/publications/>). However, it should be noted that this tracker has records of subsidies only from past years and focuses only on the largest cities and largest developments in a given state. So, it is recommended to carefully monitor city and county meetings about your local development and file a Freedom of Information Act request if needed to learn about subsidies, grants, and incentives for a given mega gas station project.

## Water use

- Where does your community source its drinking water?
- How much water per day and per month does your city/county use? How much residential water per capita? How is water use regulated?
- Find out who is in charge of your municipal water system, what they charge businesses versus individuals for water, and what the total daily capacity of your local water system is.
- How much water will be going to the mega gas station for toilet flushing per day and per month, according to the company's estimates?
  - Where did the mega gas station get these estimates from? Are they based on averages for smaller gas stations, or actual projected traffic and water use?
  - Can you produce an estimate of your own based on comparable businesses in the area?
- Who are your local water experts? Find out who manages the water and wastewater systems, as well as whether any civic or environmental organizations look at water supply and water use (especially relevant in areas with water scarcity).



## Water and soil quality

- How much of the community gets drinking water from private wells?
- How close is the proposed gas station project to your community's drinking water source(s)?  
Groundwater sources such as private wells or small community water systems are particularly vulnerable to contamination from underground storage tanks.  
If possible, find out how many private wells are within one thousand feet of the proposed center, how many people are served by these wells, and what (if any) access they have to regular testing for water quality.
- What state agency regulates stormwater runoff, water quality, and water safety in your state?
- Will your state agency require a special permit for a mega gas station?
- Are there local or state environmental organizations that can help you navigate questions about risks to wetlands, waterways, or groundwater?
- How many underground storage tanks are proposed for this location?
- How does your state agency regulate and monitor underground storage tanks?
  - When were the regulations for USTs last updated?
  - How often are the tanks visually inspected by state regulators?
- Does your state agency run cleanups on leaking underground storage tanks?
  - If not, who takes responsibility when a leak is found?
  - If so, is there currently a backlog on these cleanups?
- Who is working on issues related to water quality in your city or state? Look into Riverkeeper organizations, statewide environmental groups, Indigenous tribes and environmental justice groups, and, sometimes, local chapters of national organizations like the Sierra Club. They may have data or information or be interested in joining your fight.

## Air pollution

- How many gas pumps are proposed for this location?
- How many underground storage tanks are proposed?
- How close is the proposed site to nearby homes and schools? Note that hazardous levels of benzene in the air have been documented up to 524 feet away from gas pumps.
- How is air quality monitored in your state, and will any of these monitoring requirements apply to the proposed mega gas station?
- Does your city or state require any setbacks related to gas station air pollution?
- Is there a plan to measure changes in air quality around the new mega gas station?

- Who is working on issues related to air pollution and air quality in your city or state? Find environment and climate justice organizations, chapters of environmental groups, and/or community health projects that may be concerned with issues like childhood asthma and exposure to carcinogens. They may have data or information or be interested in joining your fight.

## Traffic congestion

- How much daily traffic is anticipated at the new location?
- Will the city or village require a traffic study to address congestion issues? Try to get a copy of that study as soon as it is available.
- Find out if there is another traffic expert you could commission to critically analyze that study, or produce their own study looking critically at worst-case scenarios.
- How much will the upgrades to roadways cost, and who will pay for those upgrades? How long will the upgrades take? Is that conversation being held publicly, or is it a private negotiation between the state and city and the company? You can demand that this information and meetings around the agreements be made public.
- What people and communities might be affected by changing flows of traffic around the new mega gas station? Do they know about the proposed project already?

## Media coverage

- Who are your local news outlets and journalists who cover city or county politics, business, and development? Are there blogs, Facebook or Instagram pages, or TikTok users that a lot of people follow?
- Do local news outlets and popular social media creators know about the proposed development and about the opposition?
- Reach out and introduce yourself and your group. Make sure the media is prepared to cover the opposition to a mega gas station, and make sure they have access to the research about pollution, economic impact, etc.
- Develop talking points for your group that are consistent, concise, and positive. Base these talking points in facts and community concerns about the development. Bring these talking points up as often as possible, with many different voices, in all forums.
- Find subject-matter experts (law, real estate, water protection, air pollution, climate change, traffic experts, etc.) whom media can speak with for information about mega gas station developments that doesn't come from the company.
  - Remember, the company owners will come armed with a lot of facts and figures. Not all of these will be true or factual, so the more capacity you have to fact-check and challenge their information, the stronger your campaign will be.
- Consult this resource from MLK50, "Don't Talk to a Journalist until You Read This," to be sure you know your rights and limits when speaking to members of the media: <https://mlk50.com/before-you-talk-to-a-journalist/>.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Lewis Raven Wallace, "Don't Talk to a Journalist until You Read This," MLK50: Justice Through Journalism, <https://mlk50.com/before-you-talk-to-a-journalist/>.

## Indigenous lands and racial justice

- Find out whose ancestral lands the proposed development will be on. What Indigenous tribes lay claim to this land? Is it ceded or unceded? Are there broken treaties?
- What is the history of displacement, segregation, and infrastructure inequality in your area?
  - Are there nearby communities that have been deprived of the amenities the new mega gas station is proposing, such as water and sewer access?
- Connect with Black, Brown, and Indigenous environmental justice organizations and communities who are often the targets of harmful development.
- What are Indigenous leaders in your area saying about sustainable development? Are there alternative proposals that would benefit people and the environment that your group can bring to the table?

## Political donations

- How are political donations tracked in your state?
  - Find out where and how often that reporting happens, as required by federal law. Usually this information can be found on a state board of elections online database of campaign disclosure reports, but it may be incomplete.
- Search OpenSecrets, Transparency USA, and any statewide databases for the owners of the company—Arch Aplin and Don Wasek in the case of Buc-ee's—as well as the company name.<sup>86</sup>
  - Repeat these searches quarterly as campaign disclosure reports come in after the fact.

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<sup>86</sup> <https://www.transparencyusa.org/>; <https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup>; <https://www.ncsbe.gov/campaign-finance>



# Conclusion: The Future Of Roadside Gas

The current political environment in the United States is haunted by denial about the impending crises caused by climate change and human influences on the environment. Regardless of whether regulation slows fossil fuel consumption or speeds it up, fossil fuels are a limited resource that will become increasingly expensive and destructive over time. One study suggests that 80 percent of gas stations will be unprofitable by 2035—only ten years from now—as people inevitably make the shift toward electric vehicle technology.<sup>87</sup> Another predicts that EVs will have a majority of new market share before the year 2040.<sup>88</sup>

Cities and counties have the power to plan for a different future. In many places, gas stations exist in high concentrations already.<sup>89</sup> Communities should carefully consider whether an economic future dependent on roadside gas makes sense for them—especially when it comes with the potential for long-term damage to community health and wealth.

Organizers around the country, such as Beyond Toxics, A Voice for Orange County, Stand.earth’s SAFE Cities campaign, 7 Directions of Service, and others, have proposed thoughtful alternatives to roadside gas station development. “By rethinking how to utilize the often-centralized and valuable locations occupied by gas stations, urban planners could consider a myriad of other zoning options, from retail, to restaurants, to rest areas,” write the authors of the 2023 Beyond Toxics report.<sup>90</sup> Indigenous organizers in particular have been leading a global push toward divestment from fossil fuels and reinvestment in sustainable practices and relationships to land, redubbing the fossil fuel economy “fossil fuel colonialism.”<sup>91</sup> A successful resistance will place Indigenous voices and values and local voices and values in conversation with each other to envision alternatives to gas station development and a fierce rejection of the late-capitalist behemoth that is Buc-ee’s.

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<sup>87</sup> <https://www.transparencyusa.org/>; <https://www.opensecrets.org/donor-lookup>; <https://www.ncsbe.gov/campaign-finance>

<sup>87</sup> Mirko Rubeis et al., “Is There a Future for Service Stations?,” Boston Consulting Group, July 12, 2019, <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2019/service-stations-future>.

<sup>88</sup> Metz and London, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot,” 1.

<sup>89</sup> Abdullah Rafaqat, Gas Stations in the United States of America: Everything You Need to Know, xMap, March 13, 2024, <https://www.xmap.ai/blog/gas-stations-in-united-states-of-america-everything-you-need-to-know>.

<sup>90</sup> Leavitt et al., Beneath the Pump, 22.

<sup>91</sup> Indigenous Climate Action, Healing the Land: Indigenous Perspectives on Divestment, February 10, 2025, <https://www.indigenousclimateaction.com/entries/new-divestment-report>; Aviva Chomsky, “Indigenous Activists Are Leading the Fight against Fossil Fuel Colonialism,” Nation, August 14, 2024, <https://www.thenation.com/article/world/indigenous-activists-fossil-fuel-colonialism/>.

# Glossary Of Terms

**Benzene.** Benzene is a clear liquid with a sweet smell that easily turns to a gas under the right conditions. The chemical typically makes up 1 to 3 percent of the volume of commercial gasoline.<sup>92</sup> Benzene is a carcinogen that has been associated with lung cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma, chronic lymphocytic leukemia, multiple myeloma, chronic myeloid leukemia, acute myeloid leukemia, other cancers of the blood and bone marrow, low white blood cell count, and problems with fertility.<sup>93</sup> In 2010, the World Health Organization stated that there is no safe level for indoor benzene exposure.<sup>94</sup>

**BTEX—Benzene, Ethylbenzene, Toluene, Xylene.** BTEX is a commonly used abbreviation for a cluster of toxic substances typically found in gasoline. All are colorless but carry a strong odor, and all are associated with cancer in humans above a certain level of exposure.<sup>95</sup> BTEX chemicals can affect the blood, respiratory system, bone marrow, fertility, and even cell growth.

**Carcinogen.** A carcinogen is any substance that increases cancer risk. Causal relationships between individual chemicals and specific cancers can be very difficult to establish scientifically—thus, it is notable that benzene and BTEX chemicals are widely recognized carcinogens.

**Hydrocarbon.** A term for any number of chemical compounds made up only of hydrogen and carbon. Benzene and methane are both hydrocarbons and hydrocarbons form the foundation of all petroleum and natural gas products.

**Petroleum.** A complex mixture of hydrocarbons that occurs in earth in liquid, gaseous, or solid form. Petroleum can refer to crude oil, refined oil, natural gas, and the viscous or solid form known as bitumen, which is found in tar sands.

**Toxics/Toxicity.** Toxic means poisonous, and toxicity refers to the level of poison present in a given substance or environment and its ability to harm creatures or ecosystems. Toxicity in environmental regulations is usually measured in terms of its impact over time on humans at a given level of exposure. Chemicals are prioritized for regulation based on this evaluation of risk.

**USTs and LUSTs.** Underground storage tanks and leaking underground storage tanks, respectively. According to the EPA, “An underground storage tank system is a tank and any underground piping connected to the tank that has at least 10 percent of its combined volume underground. The federal UST regulations apply only to UST systems storing either petroleum or certain hazardous substances.”<sup>96</sup> The number of USTs in the US has gone from over two million when the EPA began regulating them to closer to half a million today. LUST is a term for underground storage tanks that are actively leaking or in the process of a cleanup.

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<sup>92</sup> Metz and London, “Governing the Gasoline Spigot.”

<sup>93</sup> “Benzene and Cancer Risk,” American Cancer Society, <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/risk-prevention/chemicals/benzene.html>.

<sup>94</sup> *WHO Guidelines for Indoor Air Quality: Selected Pollutants*, World Health Organization Europe, 2010, <https://iris.who.int/bitstream/handle/10665/260127/9789289002134-eng.pdf?sequence=1>.

<sup>95</sup> “BTEX,” Science Direct, <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/earth-and-planetary-sciences/btex>.

<sup>96</sup> “Learn about Underground Storage Tanks,” US Environmental Protection Agency, September 9, 2024, <https://www.epa.gov/ust/learn-about-underground-storage-tanks>. Underground Storage Tanks (USTs) Laws and Regulations, <https://www.epa.gov/ust/underground-storage-tanks-usts-laws-and-regulations>.

<sup>97</sup> “Underground Storage Tanks,” US Environmental Protection Agency, February 24, 2025, <https://www.epa.gov/ust>. Code of Federal Regulations, <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-40/chapter-I/subchapter-J/part-302?toc=1>

# Recommended Further Reading

## Health impacts of gas stations

“Vent pipe emissions from storage tanks at gas stations: Implications for setback distances,” *Science of the Total Environment*. This 2018 study, led by researchers with Columbia University’s Mailman School of Public Health, measured the flow rates of vent pipes that release fuel vapors from gas stations’ underground storage tanks. It found that emissions were more than ten times higher than previous estimates. That has important implications for the health of nearby residents and workers, as well as jurisdictions that use these estimates to calculate setback requirements. <https://ceds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Vent-pipe-emissions-from-storage-tanks-at-gas-stations.pdf>

“Residential proximity to gasoline stations and risk of childhood leukemia,” *American Journal of Epidemiology*. This 2017 meta-analysis of three case-controlled studies found that “it seems fairly clear that there is a significant association between CL and residential proximity to gasoline stations.” <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article-abstract/185/1/1/2631401>

“Risk assessment on benzene exposure among gasoline station workers,” *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. This 2019 study by Thai and Danish scientists assessed the health risk from inhaling benzene among gas station workers, both fuelers and cashiers. It found a high risk of adverse health effects, with the fuelers at especially significant risk. The authors called for health surveillance for gas station workers. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC6678808>

## Reports on gas station and UST regulation

*Beneath the Pump: The Threat of Petroleum Contamination*, Beyond Toxics. This 2023 report by an Oregon-based environmental justice organization uses Eugene, Oregon, as a case study for the over-proliferation of gas stations, the problems they cause in communities due to vapors and underground leaks, and options for community advocacy. It includes an accessible overview of BTEX chemicals and the science and risks associated with them. [https://www.beyondtoxics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BeneathThePump\\_TheThreat-of-PetroleumContamination\\_FINAL\\_10-13-23.pdf](https://www.beyondtoxics.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/BeneathThePump_TheThreat-of-PetroleumContamination_FINAL_10-13-23.pdf)

“Governing the Gasoline Spigot: Gas Stations and the Transition Away From Gasoline,” *Environmental Law Reporter*. This detailed 2021 report by the co-executive directors of environmental organization Coltura discusses the many environmental hazards of gas stations, options for governance and regulation, and the necessity of a transition away from fossil fuel economies in the context of climate change. [https://www.eli.org/sites/default/files/docs/elr\\_pdf/51.10054.pdf](https://www.eli.org/sites/default/files/docs/elr_pdf/51.10054.pdf)

*Leaking Underground Storage Tanks: A Threat to Public Health and Environment*, Sierra Club. This 2006 advocacy report looks at the environmental threat of leaking underground storage tanks across the country, detailing the problem with backlogged cleanups state by state. Some of the information is now out of date, but it provides a strong foundation for understanding the issues with LUSTs. <https://www.csu.edu/cerc/documents/LUSTThreattoPublicHealth.pdf>



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*Construction site for the future Buc-ee's. The Mebane location will cover over thirty-one acres of land and include a seventy-four-thousand-square-foot building and 120 pumping stations. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media*



*A residential driveway can be seen directly across the street from the Buc-ee's construction site. Emerging science shows that gas station vapors are even more damaging to people's health than previously thought. Living near a gas station is among the known risk factors for childhood leukemia due to benzene exposure. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media*





A Buc-ee's billboard can be seen along I-40 as travelers approach the exit for the future Buc-ee's.. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media



The North Carolina Commerce Park sign sits across the street from the future Buc-ee's site. In the background, Hawfields Community Park ball fields.. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media



Images of downtown Mebane's historic district. A sign reading, "Mebane, Positively Charming," welcomes travelers as they make their way to downtown Mebane. Photos courtesy of Iximché Media





*Ventilation pipes located at the Pilot across the street from the future Buc-ee's site. Photo courtesy of Iximché Media*



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**Massive Footprints. Minimal Oversight. Long-Term Damage.**

“Buc-ee’s Burden” uncovers how gas station expansion—led by chains like Buc-ee’s—  
is fueling environmental injustice across the U.S.