For decades during the 20th Century, the City of Fort Myers dumped lime sludge—a byproduct of the water treatment processes—in Dunbar, a predominately black neighborhood near downtown. Last year, tests were done on the dumpsite and high arsenic levels were discovered.
Tuesday, the city council was briefed on an assessment of the site and what options the city has.

Fort Myers City Council was briefed by Black & Veatch, an environmental consulting company. And their verdict: the arsenic discovered on the Dunbar dump site in a residential neighborhood posed no risk to human health.

Fort Myers Mayor Randy Henderson said this is a relief for the city and he thinks it'll be a relief for Dunbar residents as well.

"The takeaway is that we can, with confidence, say to those citizens that 'you don't need to worry about your health from this site,'" said Henderson.
In its briefing to city council, Black & Veatch admitted that tests on and around the dumpsite show arsenic levels that exceed the Environmental Protection Agency’s safe Primary Drinking Water Standard, which is 10 micrograms. Some readings were as high as 50 micrograms.

**RELATED: Testing Begins On Dunbar Dump Site**

“There is arsenic in the lime sludge," said Mark Martin of Black & Veatch. "But it’s not contributing to the groundwater. The other conclusion is that arsenic concentrations in the sludge—they don’t pose a short or long term health concern in people in the surrounding neighborhood.”

Martin also contended that the city’s public water supply wells are more than a mile away from the dumpsite. As for private wells, Black & Veatch said those wells are far enough below the depth of the lime sludge to not be impacted.

Dunbar resident Anthony Thomas is skeptical about the consulting firm’s findings, but he said he’s not surprised.

“So you're accused of wrongdoing by your citizens and by the state," said Thomas. "You hire a consultant whose job it is to work with you the consultants go out and they do their job which is to represent your interests”

Thomas said he would like to have seen Florida’s Department of Environmental Protection conduct the tests, because their interest would be the public, not the city.

Fellow Dunbar resident David Thompson wants to know more.

“Because my parents bought the home that we reside now in 1965. So a lot of the older people that were in that general area that owned their own personal homes. These people did develop cancer," said Thompson

Back in December, other Dunbar residents came before city council to voice concerns about health as well.

**RELATED: More Tests On Dunbar Dumpsite as Fort Myers Hires Legal Counsel**
The city council retained a law firm last month in anticipation of potential class-action medical lawsuits. Even though Black & Veatch's findings say that no adverse health risks could have happened, Mayor Henderson said it's still important to have legal counsel.

"If people were concerned and they feel the need to bring action against the city we should be prepared to deal with that," he said. "And we should help citizens get more understanding if they're still not convinced that they're safe, that there haven't been harm from this site."

Fort Myers has a few options regarding the site. The city could do nothing, or it could turn the site into a park. It could also cap the land with concrete or asphalt, or remove and replace the soil for potential development.

The city will hold a community meeting in Dunbar on January 25th to talk about what this all means for the residents near the dump site.

Here's the video from the city council meeting: