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WHERE WE ARE WITH THE SEWER PROJECT AT THIS TIME

The purpose of this column is to update the community on the progress of the Proposed Sewer Project in the Indian River Downtown Business District (Business District). The Business District stretches from Wilson's Rivers Edge Restaurant and the Big Bear Adventures/Subway store north on Straits Hwy. to the Inn Between including several businesses and homes just off the main road. It also includes Ken's Village Market and all the businesses on M-68 up to the and including the Industrial Park. Petitions to accept the Proposed Sewer Project were sent out in mid-July to the property owners within this designated Business District. There seems to be some hesitancy by some property owners to sign the petition, possibly due to confusion over the progress, the system design and the actual cost. We would like to try and clarify some of this confusion.

At this stage, the engineering firm of Gourdie-Fraser, Inc. has finished a feasibility report that reviewed several different types of systems. The system best suited for Tuscarora Township (Township) is the Septic Treatment Effluent Pump-Septic Treatment Effluent Gravity system, also known as the STEP-STEAG System. A STEP-STEAG System would place a new septic tank at each property site (or leave the current one if it is good shape) to collect waste material (i.e. bio-solids). Gray water, which is water that runs through building plumbing systems into the septic tank, is pumped into a main sewer line and then up to a treatment facility which would be built in the Industrial Park on M-68 east of town. Each septic tank will be checked regularly and the bio-solids will be pumped and hauled away. The monitoring and pumping service as well as the initial hook up charge is included in an Operations and Maintenance Cost (O&M).

As mentioned, research completed by Gourdie-Fraser has shown that the STEP-STEAG system is the most financially economical and effective approach Gourdie-Fraser has been asked to continue investigating alternative technologies and systems to insure that the Township gets the maximum benefit for the budget invested.

In addition, to help lower costs the Sewer Committee, Gourdie-Fraser, and The Township Board Members have been meeting with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in an attempt to bring Burt Lake State Park into the system. Presently, the cost per Residential Equivalent Unit (REU) is \$63 per month, which includes installation fees and O&M expenses. If the State Park joins the district the REU will be lowered about 25%. This fee is collected in two ways. The debt to our lender (USDA/Rural Development) about 50% of the REU, would be included on the summer tax bill to the property owner. The remainder, the O&M, would be billed monthly or quarterly, however the Township chooses to administrate this fee.

The Township has signed preliminary papers to receive a \$1,500,000 grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The remaining \$2,600,000 needed to install the Proposed System will come through a low interest USDA loan. When a series of requirements have been met by the Township and Gourdie-Fraser the money will be transferred from the USDA to the Township as the project advances.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Are we under a timetable to finish the project?

The USDA has stated that it may take a year or two before we even get a shovel in the ground, so we have time and we want to get it right.

Will the roads be torn up?

For the most part, no. The connections to the proposed sewer system will be behind the businesses and homes usually where the household plumbing connects with the septic system. Much of the sewer lines will be installed through directional drilling which leaves most of the ground intact.

Will my payment ever change?

That answer is two fold. Once the project is done and the final cost per REU calculated, the mortgage debt to the USDA can only go down. As businesses and homes within the district join in the monthly payment will either be diluted or the Township may opt to build up a sewer fund in order to provide contingency fees or to pay off the debt early. On the other end of the equation the O&M may rise due to uncontrollable circumstances, the most obvious is the cost of energy, so yes, there is always the chance that the O&M may rise.

When do I receive my first bill?

If construction begins in the spring of 2009 the billing cycle will not begin until late 2009 or early 2010.

Will there be open town meetings for citizens to ask questions and bring their concerns?

Absolutely. But the Sewer Committee wants to be sure of the status of the State Park. As we gather information and learn more about the proposed system as well as a more concrete determination of the cost we will schedule the first of at least three town meetings.

Will the petitions be sent around a second time?

Possibly. We will send out pertinent information as it comes to light.

There have been many questions and concerns within the community and it has been difficult to address them and disseminate the necessary information. We hope to post a column every two or three weeks in this paper as issues arise and keep the community informed as to where we are. We are also investigating using the township's website to post and update information as well as creating an e-mail address to submit questions.

Please know that the Sewer Committee, the township and the engineering firm are working hard to provide the best system at the lowest cost possible. Your input is not only welcome, it is necessary.

Submitted by the Sewer Project Committee

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