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Water, wastewater plan laid out for residents

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MILLSBORO -- The town of Millsboro is trying to put the water troubles of the past behind them and move on, but in order to do that, they have a monumental project in front of them.

The proposed plan to improve the current water and wastewater situation in the town that is estimated to cost \$36 million was recently brought to public hearing and explained to residents in attendance.

"Our concern was to keep the cost as low as possible, but in the end we feel this is the best way to go," Mayor Larry Gum said at the public hearing.

The \$36 million dollars needed for this project is the top concern of the residents and council, Gum said and the council -- along with the town's engineers, CABA Associates -- believes they have devised the best plan for the improvements and acquiring the money.

"CABA Associates has given us every option they could try and keep the spending to a lower amount of money that will have to do to purchase property and get out of town," Gum said.

The town will have to purchase land as a part of the new wastewater treatment plan.

Currently, Millsboro's treated wastewater is discharged into the Indian River, but according to Delaware's Total Maximum Daily Load program -- designed to avoid having treated wastewater go directly into the waterways -- that method must cease.

"(The nutrients) cause algae to grow uncontrollably," said Mark Downes, an associate with CABA Associates. "What that does is block out sunlight that is needed by the aquatic reservation, which also causes loss of habitat."

The treated wastewater will be piped to the purchased land where it will be used as spray irrigation. At one time, this was not an option for the town because of the cost associated with land acquisition.

The wastewater project is the larger of the two projects on the agenda for Millsboro, with the wastewater improvements estimated to cost \$31.5 million while \$1.66 million will be needed to complete improvements to the town's water system.

The town is expecting to receive low-interest loans from the state and federal levels. One loan will come from the State Revolving Fund (SRF) loan program where they will receive \$9.6 million and another is expected to come from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) in the amount of \$25 million. Additionally, the town is also eligible for \$6.53 million in grants, Town Manager Faye Lingo said.

Despite the fact that most of the money is hopefully being covered by low-interest loans, the town still must raise money to cover remaining costs. They plan on doing this by taking advantage of the growing population.

"When this project started, it was something that was going to be done anyway," Gum said. "Then the growth came to town, so at the same time in early planning, we were able to incorporate growth along with what was going to happen."

The town is planning to increasing sewer impact fees for new homes. The current impact fee on sewer is \$2,000

per equivalent dwelling unit (EDU). The council plans to raise the amount to \$4,500 per EDU. They are also planning to increase the annexation fees for the town from \$4,400 to \$7,500 per acre.

Downes said the fees are not for current residents, but instead aimed at the new homes and land in town.

It is also anticipated that the town will generate some money by increasing the sewer user fees. The council anticipates adopting the increase from \$0.45 per 100 gallons to \$0.60 per 100 gallons to begin in 2008.

With the town's plan laid out for everyone to see, the proposed plan will go to a vote on Saturday, Aug. 25. The vote will take place at the Millsboro Town Hall from 1 to 7 p.m.

"If it doesn't pass than we are back to the drawing board to figure out what to do," Gum said. "We'd have to redress it and go over it piece by piece one at a time because we haven't been given a choice."

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