

Most critical areas

Board will fund study for countywide sewer

By Terry Pope
County Editor

It will take six months to complete a countywide study of stormwater and sewer system needs, and Brunswick County commissioners Monday allocated a portion of funds needed and hired a consultant to start the job.

HDR Engineering Corp. will perform the work on a tight schedule, starting in May and finishing in November. The company last year conducted a county study of the water department and recommended ways to make it more economical and self-supporting.

Project engineer Eric Williams said the company can draw on some of the work done in that water study for the sewer plan.

"Our goal is to develop a master plan to put the county in position to offer countywide sewer," said Williams.

Countywide does not mean sewer for every house or neighborhood. Instead, it means a comprehensive study of the entire county, outlining existing systems and showing where the greatest needs are to serve the greatest number of users.

"We're talking about trying to develop how essential areas will be served by sewer," said Williams. "It's not limited to a specific area. It's going to look at the entire coun-

ty." Commissioners allocated \$35,000 from the public utilities department to start phase I of the plan and agreed to address additional funding for phase II and phase III in the upcoming 1998-99 fiscal year budget. Total cost may be around \$175,000.

The board has already taken the lead in developing a user-based system in northern Brunswick County, to include the towns of Leland and Navassa, the North Brunswick Sanitary District, along with a government-private partnership with Landmark Development Corp., developers of the Magnolia Greens golf course and subdivision.

HDR's plan will likely recommend several projects, and some will take priority based on the most urgent needs and where the most users are in place, said Williams. He said the commission-appointed Stormwater Management and Sewer Oversight Committee, headed by May Moore of Yaupon Beach, will remain actively involved with HDR Engineers.

"We don't want to go away and hide in a room and come back with a plan," said Williams.

After meeting with county commissioners last May, the committee asked for resolutions of support from all 18 municipalities to devel-

op a countywide plan. Ms. Moore said 17 towns have adopted the resolution. County manager Jim Varner said drafting the plan is beyond the technical expertise of the committee and he recommended that a consultant be hired.

Six firms were contacted and four were interviewed. Phase I will analyze existing problems found in the county and compare population estimates with local projections for growth. Phase II will prioritize the projects, and Phase III will answer the question of how does the county get started.

Ms. Moore said this plan needs to be completed before the county can

apply for grants or funding.

"To the best of my knowledge, we are moving in the right direction," said Ms. Moore. "Right now, we have pressing needs in this county."

Total cost of the project will be negotiable once phase I is done. Varner said there should be funds available in the public utilities budget for the rest of the project. Commissioners said they do not want their appointed committee left out of the picture.

"They've got a good feel for what this board wants, I believe," said David Sandifer, District 2 commissioner, "and it's important that they be the driving force behind this."

Commissioners reached agreement last year to proceed with developing the Northeast Brunswick Wastewater Facility project in the northern communities. A \$125,000 N. C. Rural Economic Development Center grant will be used to draft a facilities plan and weigh the project's environmental impact on the community.

The county has already set aside \$1,590,000 to expand the treatment facility at the Leland Industrial Park. Commissioners have also agreed that all county funds used to build sewer projects will be repaid from user fees and that the systems will be self-supporting.

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