

Ground broken on sewer service project

Hemstreet Park will get hookup

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SARATOGA COUNTY — The town of Schaghticoke broke ground Tuesday on a \$5.4 million project that will provide Saratoga County sewer service to the 230 homes in Hemstreet Park, marking the first time that sewer service has been provided to customers outside the county.

The project will drill a 2,100-foot pipe that will run at least 20 feet below the bottom of the Hudson River between Schaghticoke in Rensselaer County and the Saratoga County sewer pumping station in southern Mechanicville.

“We had people come to us as early as 1982,” said Nancy Harder, the town’s budget director. “Their concern was that some of their [septic systems] were failing and it was creating an unhealthy living situation over there.”

The town was able recently to secure a series of grants and low-interest loans to pay for the project.

Harder said securing the approvals and grants through various levels of government was a long and difficult process.

As part of the project, workers will build a \$227,000 pumping station on the corner of Locust Street and South Hudson Avenue that will pump sewage down a 1-mile-long pipe that will run under River Road.

The sewage will then be piped below the Hudson River to the county pumping station.

The project has approval from both the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the state Department of Environmental Conservation, Harder said.

The project is being funded with \$2.4 million in grants and a \$3.2 million, 30-year, no-interest loan.

“If the town did not do something with the cooperation of the people over there, then the Rensselaer County Health Department was going to step in, but they allowed us this time knowing we were working hard to get this done,” Harder said.

Connection to the sewer system for Hemstreet Park residents will be mandatory. The town approved the project based on a petition signed by a majority of affected residents.

Harder said she understands some people who recently purchased a septic system may be frustrated at the mandatory connection.

“It’s difficult for those people. They’ve put money into it, but again, the majority rules,” she said. “That’s the way government is.”

Annual sewer rates for Hemstreet Park households are expected to average at about \$650; \$408 of that will be used to pay off the \$3.2 million loan.

Hemstreet Park customers will be charged one and a half times the normal Saratoga County rate.

The rate for Saratoga County customers averages \$138 per unit annually, but actual rates vary widely by community due to local operations and maintenance costs.

Residents who refuse to connect to the new sewer system could be cited and taken to court by the town, Harder said.

Residents will be required to pay an estimated \$2,000-\$5,000 to connect their homes to the system.

The town has received a \$400,000 grant to help low- and moderate-income households pay for that connection.

Although the income cutoff for the grant is not yet known because it changes yearly, officials said they hope the grant will be able to help about 80 qualifying households.

The construction of the pipe and pumping station is being done by Saugerties-based Merritt Construction, Harder said.

The project should be finished by November, and the town will immediately begin connecting users to the system.

“I think it’s about 20 years past due,” said Carlton Phelps, a Hemstreet Park resident who signed the petition in favor of a sewer solution three years ago. “I’m kind of disappointed that it took so long.”

Despite the delay, Phelps said he was pleased the town finally faced the problem.

“If you go down through the middle two or three streets here in the summer, you don’t have to be an Einstein to figure out what you’re smelling,” he added. “You can’t breathe.”

“Anything that improves the environmental well-being of the area, we are for,” Saratoga County Sewer District Commission Chairman William Davis said.

Davis said the county sewer system handles an average of 21 million gallons per day, so the estimated 70,000 gallons per day from Hemstreet Park would have only a small impact on the county system.

He added that no other communities outside of Saratoga County have expressed interest in the county sewer system yet.