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Cape city council looks at sewerage alternatives

Company's system gets positive attention.

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Written by Don Ruane

Cape Coral might have found a piece to help solve the puzzle of bringing less expensive sewer service to the city's north side.

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A system made by Orenco Systems of Sutherlin, Ore., could help people who have homes on acreage, several council members agreed during a Wednesday workshop. No decisions were made.

The City Council is having workshops twice a month to discuss how to restart the utilities expansion program. The program was suspended in 2009 until the council could review how projects are managed and how to get costs under better control.

The Orenco system would cost about \$7,500, according to Councilwoman Rana Erbrick. But the city would still have to decide how to charge property owners an impact fee since they wouldn't be creating an impact on a wastewater treatment plant, Erbrick said.

"That is the true difference in the total cost with this," Erbrick said. The city's impact fee would add \$5,400 to the cost.

The Orenco System pumps sewer water after it is filtered in a septic tank at each home into a pipe about 2 inches in diameter, explained Orenco spokesman Mike Saunders. The pressurized pipe then carries it to a pod where it receives additional treatment. Scum and sludge is left behind in

the tank.

The treatment pods can be buried or hidden behind berms.

The city would have to acquire land for the pods, noted Councilman Marty McClain. It's easier in less populated areas than more developed ones, he said.

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But the city would see savings in construction and maintenance, according to Saunders.

Large pipes, such as those used for gravity sewers, aren't needed, Saunders said.

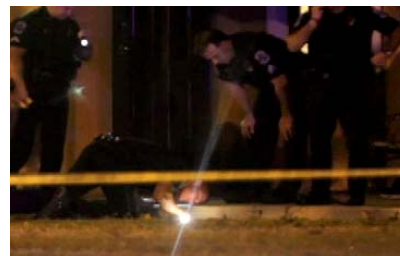
"You don't have to cut roads. You don't have to close roads," Saunders said.

One of the largest installations of the system is in North Port, where about 7,000 homes are connected. Similar systems first were used in Charlotte County in 1972, according to Saunders. Orenco has been fine-tuning its system for 30 years.

"If you're building a new home it makes a lot of sense," Saunders said. Connecting to the system is less expensive than installing a new septic system with a drain field, Saunders said.

The system is one tool the city could use in areas where people have properties of 5 acres, said Councilman Kevin McGrail. But gravity sewers would better serve more populated areas and the system of pipes and lift stations could provide storage for untreated sewage if a hurricane knocks out the power.

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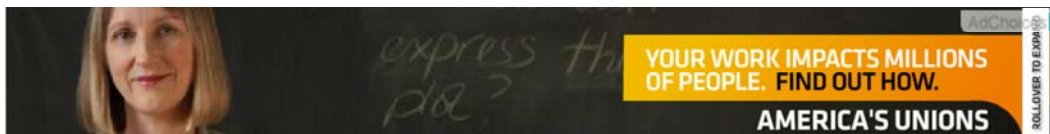
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