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Currituck eyes own facility for sewer

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CURRITUCK — Even though the up-front costs are higher, Currituck officials have decided that building a new wastewater treatment system in Moyock will be better in the long run than buying an existing plant that needs expanding.

The Board of Commissioners Monday decided against buying the privately owned Eagle Creek wastewater plant, agreeing instead to build a new plant.

The cost difference is about \$1.5 million. Expanding the Eagle Creek plant for commercial use, which means adding 200,00 gallons per day capacity, would have cost \$3.3 million. In contrast, a new plant offering the same amount of commercial flow will cost \$4.8 million, said County Engineer Eric Weatherly.

For businesses tapping into the new system, the decision could possibly mean higher impact fees and sewer bills at first until more customers hook up to services.

For the county, the system offers new potential for growth. County officials have long asserted that county sewer services are needed to attract new business into Moyock, one of the county's fastest-growing commercial hubs.

The county, and ultimately the customers who tap into services, will pay more at first for a new system. Eventually, however, the costs would even out as demand for service increases, according to county cost projections.

Once the system capacity is expanded to 300,000 gallons per day, the cost for either option would have been about even. However, any additional expansion of the new plant would cost less. Because the Eagle Creek plant is older and closer to capacity, the cost for future expansions would be more costly.

"The closer you get to build-out in Eagle Creek, the higher the cost," County Manager Dan Scanlon said.

How much businesses will pay for the new services is still undecided. County commissioners have said tax dollars will not be used for the project. Instead, businesses who tap into the services will pay impact fees and monthly bills to cover the costs.

One-time hook-up fees, also called impact fees, could range from \$4,000 to \$5,000, depending on several variables, Scanlon said. Impact fees would have been about \$1,000 less, at least initially, under the Eagle Creek option.

Currently, no rate schedule has been adopted.

"A lot of details still need to be worked out," Weatherly said.

According to initial cost projections, a customer's monthly bill could range from \$73 to \$100, depending on the impact fee. The monthly bill would be less if the impact fee is higher and vice versa.

In addition, The monthly bills could be lower if the county decides to wait longer before trying to recoup construction costs, Scanlon explained. Once more customers tap on and the new plant's capacity is expanded to 200,000 gpd, a monthly bill could range from \$30 to \$60, he said.

Had commissioners decided on the Eagle Creek option, the county would have inherited residential customers from Eagle Creek and South Ridge subdivisions, in addition to businesses along N.C. Highway 168. By building a new system, the county system will provide services exclusively to commercial customers.

County officials have discussed incorporating Moyock Commons Shopping Center into the new system. The shopping center is currently connected to a smaller, 40,000-gpd capacity sewer system. Under the new plan, customers would no longer have to pay the 25 cents per \$100 valuation fee for sewer services.

Construction of the new system could take between a year and a half to two years. Even then the plant would be too small for anticipated demand, Weatherly said. Another year would be needed to expand the plant's capacity to 200,000 gpd to meet both existing and projected demand.

The county is currently negotiating the purchase of land in northern Moyock for the plant.

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