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# Sewer service could cost \$23,000

## Home buyers would fund southern NCCo system

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## **IF YOU GO**

**What:** Meeting on New Castle County Executive Chris Coons' recommended southern sewer system area

**When:** 7 p.m. Wednesday.

**Where:** Middletown Fire Hall, 27 W. Green St.

## **THE PROPOSAL**

### **LONG-TERM DISPOSAL ALTERNATIVES**

- Rapid infiltration basins at Water Farms 1 and 2
- RIBS at other locations
- New spray irrigation sites
- Discharge from Wilmington's Wastewater Treatment Facility
- Continue to send 100,000 gallons per day to Middletown
- Evaluate role of private sector

### **THE SHORT-TERM CONSTRUCTION**

- Central Core transmission system (piping and pump stations)
- Pipe connecting to Middletown system
- Storage facility and pump station at Water Farm 2 for flows sent to Middletown
- Transmission system connecting some areas to Drawyer's Creek pump station and force main

### **SHORT TERM INFRASTRUCTURE COSTS**

Central Core Transmission System: \$30 to \$35 million

Purchase of Middletown capacity: \$3.2 million

Lease of Middletown capacity: \$133,000 a year

Infrastructure for Middletown hook-up: \$1.5 million

Water Farm 1 piping connection to Drawyer's Creek System: \$1 million

Connection to Drawyer's Creek System: \$1.5 million

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By ALISON KEPNER

The News Journal

03/10/2006

Buyers of new homes in southern New Castle County could pay up to \$23,000 in fees for sewer service and pay hundreds of dollars more in annual bills than their northern neighbors under a proposed county sewer expansion plan.

County Executive Chris Coons outlined his recommendation on how sewers should be expanded south of the Chesapeake & Delaware Canal to County Council Thursday.

The plan calls for building a \$30 million to \$35 million central core network of sewer mains feeding into the county's treatment facility near Odessa and to Middletown's separate sewer plant. The county will buy or lease 250,000 gallons per day capacity from Middletown's plant.

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**Advance Registration Required**  
**Wednesday, March 22, 2006**  
**8:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.**  
**The Waterfall Conference Center**  
**3416 Philadelphia Pike, Wilmington, DE**

The county's current facilities have the capacity to handle 1.5 million gallons a day, but enough projects have been approved to require 1.7 million gallons a day within five to 10 years.

This interim solution would provide service to four schools and about 2,000 of the 8,000 residential and business customers whose developments have been approved or are under review in the area while giving county leaders time to develop a long-term plan.

Projects with active record plans in two zones -- one around the core area and the second connecting to the county's Water Farm 1 -- would share an equal proportion of the available capacity, estimated as enough to handle only 25 percent to 33 percent of the planned houses. The rest would come online as a long-term solution is developed.

## **Interim recommendation**

Thursday's plan follows a recommendation in October from the county's consultants, Malcom Pirnie, to scrap a plan developed by former County Executive Tom Gordon's administration.

Pirnie said the proposed \$100 million expansion would cost more than \$200 million without meeting the growing region's long-term disposal needs or providing adequate funding for day-to-day operations.

Coons said his interim system, which would take two years to complete, would not require new funding because \$94 million already has been appropriated over the past decade into the Southern Sewer Service Area budget.

To finance the entire project, he proposed replacing the current \$8,164 sewer impact fee -- which hasn't been raised since its 1997 adoption -- with a capital recovery fee ranging from \$15,500 to \$22,000.

Additionally, those homes that hook up to the interim system would be charged \$1,300.

The plan also recommends future southern customers pay an operating cost in addition to their sewage rate. This could increase the average annual bill from \$240 to as much as \$700, depending on how leaders finance the loans that will be needed to pay for the system.

The plan, Coons said, ensures that growth is paying for itself. Those moving into the area will absorb the costs of the new system instead of current customers.

### **Developers unhappy**

Developers and real estate attorneys balked at the costs on Thursday, saying housing would become unaffordable for many homebuyers.

Vincent D'Anna, a real estate agent with Fox & Roach, said there may no longer be any homes under \$600,000.

"The McMansions, I don't know what they are going to be," he said.

"Over a million," an audience member answered.

Coons said the county will need to provide for affordable housing through changes to its comprehensive plan and development code.

"I'm very concerned about affordable housing, but I'm also concerned about having a financially sustainable county government," he said.

Leann Ferguson, executive vice president of the Southern New Castle County Alliance civic group, said she expected costs around the range Coons recommended.

"Those numbers are not a surprise to me," she said. "We knew there was an enormous gap between what they were charging" and the cost needed.

But the developers questioned why the county won't opt for privatization, saying it could save time and money.

### **Has seen it work**

Jeffrey Bartos, division vice president of Toll Brothers, said he has seen privatization work elsewhere.

"Private business does this faster, they do it cheaper, they do it more efficiently," he said.

Some council members also said they want to explore privatization more.

Council President Paul Clark invited the companies to bring their models to the county staff to run comparisons.

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