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Utility panel votes to defer fee payment for residents

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Town of Menasha tries to appease foes of new sewer interceptor plan

By Michael King

Post-Crescent staff writer January 28, 2008

TOWN OF MENASHA — Town officials are extending an olive branch to residents still upset over a \$932-per-acre special assessment imposed for extending the northwest interceptor sewer across town-owned parkland.

The Town Utility District Commission last week voted 4-1 to advance the first reading of an amended ordinance that would defer payment of a \$1,500-per-acre impact fee for existing residences.

Since being imposed in 1995 to cover costs associated with extending sewer and water utilities to most of the undeveloped west side of town, the impact fee was required to be paid at the time of hookup.

Under the proposal offered by Town Administrator Jeff Sturgell, the impact fee would be deferred for homes or agricultural buildings until additional service hookups on the property are requested or a development agreement with the town is enacted.

Sturgell called it an attempt to "try and repair any kind of rift" between the town and unhappy westside residents still miffed about the unpopular northwest interceptor sewer assessment approved nearly two years ago.

"I'm trying to find a way to move forward with the northwest interceptor folks," said Sturgell. "We can't go back and undo that assessment."

On Feb. 11, the amendment comes back to the commission, which is made up of all five Town Board members, for a second reading and adoption.

If approved, officials estimated about 60-100 acres of the approximately 2,000 acres still subject to the impact fee could defer its payment indefinitely, costing the utility district \$90,000 to \$150,000.

Supv. Dale McNamee called it a "good-faith gesture" from the town to northwest interceptor residents. He said the \$1 million cost to run the sewer through the future CB Park should have been shared by all town residents.

Supv. Dale Youngquist cast the lone dissenting vote, noting there is a pending lawsuit.

That referred to the legal challenge of the northwest interceptor assessment filed by Allen and Patti Haase and many of their neighbors. Their lawsuit was thrown out by a Winnebago County judge but has since been appealed to the state Court of Appeals.

"These are two independent items," said Town Atty. Chuck Koehler. He suggested the town could consider other conditions, such as a 10-year time limit or whenever the owner transfers the property.

Quick read

Last we knew: A lawsuit challenging a Town of Menasha special assessment was appealed after its dismissal by a Winnebago County judge.

The latest: Deferral of an impact fee is proposed as an olive branch to homeowners upset over the interceptor sewer assessment. What it means: If passed, residents will not pay the \$1,500-per-acre impact fee for utility hookups until their land is developed.

Barb Knaack, a resident hit by the northwest interceptor assessment, called it a "very good plan."

In late 2005, town officials pushed for the extension of utilities to the mostly undeveloped northwest portion of the town because of its potential for commercial and industrial development. The affected residents said the entire town or future developers should pay for it.