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## Liberty gets mixed opinions on plant upgrade

Sep 10, 2020

By **Matt Shortall** - co-editor

**LIBERTY** — There were mixed opinions among those who turned out to Hanofee Park on August 31 for the Town of Liberty's public hearing regarding a proposed \$20 million upgrade to the Wastewater Treatment Plant serving the Swan Lake - Briscoe Road District.

Built in 1986, the town says the current plant is approaching the end of its life expectancy and needs an upgrade to meet anticipated future demand as well as address the regulatory compliance issues that come with more development.

Town of Liberty Supervisor, Frank DeMayo, says Liberty has a limited window of opportunity to secure zero percent financing for the project.

Helen Budrock and Dave Ohman of Delaware Engineering led the public through an overview of the proposal and answered questions.

Delaware Engineering says that DEC regulatory permit limits will change in the future as more growth happens in the region. Budrock said the plant is operating within the current regulatory compliance schedule, but the DEC gets more strict with effluent limits as more development occurs.

"It's important to think about not just what's happening now but what could be happening 20-30 years in the future," Budrock said. "We need to take into consideration the fact that the DEC may have stricter permit limits down the road."

Delaware Engineering says a typical user currently pays around \$1,058 annually for sewer service. If the town builds the upgrade with a zero percent loan and there's no new development, the annual cost for a typical sewer user could increase as much as \$579. Delaware Engineer says if the town secures a grant to build an upgrade and more development occurs, sewer fees could actually decrease to around \$529 annually.

During public comment, district resident Michael Edwards pointed out that these numbers are relying on large-scale development.

"That will change the rural character of the area and there are significant environmental and other issues that have to be taken into account because of that residential expansion," Edwards said. "I'm not convinced that this particular proposal is either the most cost effective or the most beneficial to the community as a whole, even though I fully support the board's desire to improve our sewer [system]."

"I hope that the Liberty Town council members are willing to take a long hard look at this sewer proposal and will seek viable alternatives to a \$10 - 20 million dollar price tag," said resident Cora Edwards. "What impact will the tax hike have, especially on our seniors, retirees, and other members of our community on fixed incomes?"

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By: **MATT SHORTALL** | **DEMOCRAT**

Councilmember Dean Farrand and Town Supervisor Frank DeMayo listen to a Delaware Engineering presentation on the proposed upgrade to the Swan Lake-Briscoe Road Waste Water Treatment Plant during a recent public hearing in Liberty.

- ▶ Silver Feather award will benefit historic Bloomingburg church
- ▶ Village elections set for Tuesday
- ▶ Monticello to decide mayoral race
- ▶ Nun loses home and dog in fire
- ▶ Residents start neighborhood watch in Narrowsburg

Sullivan County native and builder Allen Werlau said the zero percent financing is a significant point, and the project could help increase the town's tax base.

"The need for the improvement is great," Werlau said.

He expressed concern that one day soon the DEC will mandate upgrades to the existing plant and the town will not get zero percent financing on the project.

"It will fall with higher costs and higher stumbling blocks ... every improvement costs money. Can we afford it? We cannot afford to pass this up."

Werlau said a municipality that does not consistently update its infrastructure will lose out on development opportunities.

"There's nothing tougher for a board, a builder or an applicant - whether it's commercial, residential or industrial - to come in and address an area where they'd like to do something and they can't because of water and sewer."

Resident Nancy Levine said there's no question that the Town needs an infrastructure upgrade, but also expressed concern about preserving the rural character of Swan Lake.

"With this amount of development that you're looking at, it just seems to me that it's going to be a parking lot all down Route 55 and anything going on Stanton Corner Road where we have so many existing problems now."

Swan Lake resident Bill Liblick expressed concerns about the tax burden residents are already facing, how the promise of development is never guaranteed and the uncertainty many residents find themselves in due to COVID-19.

"I'm concerned about how much this is really going to cost," Liblick said. "Let's look at the broader picture. Is now the time?"

Public comment will remain open until 6 p.m. on September 14.

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