

Sewer District building new Waste Water Treatment Plant

BY PAM STEVENS | EDITOR

What this means for consumers and the future

The Sewer District is a term most of us only know because of the monthly bill we pay to them, but without the Lake Stevens Sewer District and their Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP), none of us would be able to flush our toilets without contaminating our waterways.

Currently, the WWTP is located in a flood plain off of Ebey Slough and S 204 and has almost maxed out on its capacity of 4.1 million gallons per day running through the plant. That amount covers just over 10,000 households.

Costs to renovate the existing plant by building levies and dikes to avoid future flooding and raise treatment to upcoming State and Federal requirements, would cost sewer district consumers more than building a new WWTP outside the flood plain.

After the last flood in 2002, over a million dollars had to be spent to repair the dikes.

"We had a gigantic decision to make," George Wood, Sewer Commissioner said. "We are all very concerned about our rate payers."

On August 28, the sewer district and its commissioners awarded the new building contract to Balfour Beatty for \$96.7 million with the project, local between Sunnyside Avenue and SR-204, taking approximately three years to complete.

"We felt that we got a very good bid considering the climate we are in right now," Mike Jauhola, Professional Engineer and Project Manager for Lake Stevens Sewer District said.

There will also be costs of \$5.1 million for the Vernon Road diversion construction, which brings the total to \$100.7 million. The good news is that the Sewer District has been working with the City of Lake Stevens to obtain very low interest loans and currently have \$77

million dollars available through different agencies.

“Part of the key to the whole thing is the City and the District is working together,” Wood said.

Other factors came into play when receiving some of these loans.

“We obtained the loan because of the high quality of water we will be providing,” Jauhola said.

They have also been saving fees received from builders and developers that are paid to add new homes into the lines each time a home is built and sold. They have around \$18 million with more to come as the building continues.

“The bad part is that the economy is down right now and so is the building,” Wood said.

Even with the slowing real estate market, the Sewer District does have commitments for around 2,500 homes not yet built.

While a rate hike is inevitable, the Sewer District is looking at many options including more low interest loans and different ways of charging for usage.

Their hope is to get more community input through emails, letters and even providing an open house in the near future to answer questions and hear concerns.

“The desire to improve our situation isn’t just ego, we are very concerned about our situation,” Sewer Commissioner Jim Mitchell said. “We are going to do everything we can to keep the rates down but I’m afraid there is going to be an increase.”

The Sewer District and the City have been working together to make sure they are prepared for future growth and the new WWTP will be able to expand service into the City’s UGA and serve any potential growth through the year 2025.

The date and time of any future public meetings will be announced in the Journal.

