

City rejects Southside sewer request

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May 5, 2006

Committee cites concerns over capacity, future needs

SANDPOINT -- At least for now, Southside Water & Sewer District's hope of pumping its excess sewage across the Pend Oreille River to the city's wastewater treatment plant will remain a pipe dream.

Although it offered to pony up to \$1 million to construct an underwater transmission line to the Lakeshore treatment facility, Sandpoint's Public Works Committee is still not ready to embrace the district's proposal.

Facing a crush of concerns regarding the city's commitment to its current and future customers, the committee passed on recommending Southside's plan to the full City Council. The district was offering to pay user-fees and maintenance costs for hooking up to Sandpoint's wastewater plant.

"We have 620 new units coming on for sewer connections that we're committed to," said Committeewoman Helen Newton. "It seems to me if J-U-B Engineers' study says our treatment plant is at near-capacity now, with more annexation requests north of town and acres of undeveloped land in the city, I don't see how we can extend services south of the river."

Connecting to the city would have added an extra 320 customers, with a total estimated build-out at 620, said district chairman Gary Westcott.

Using 6,000 gallons each month -- about 200 gallons per household --Southside customers would pay a \$35 monthly service to the city, added Westcott. He also suggested the district would pump sewage at times when the treatment plant was operating below optimum capacity, around 7 a.m. and 10 p.m.

"Once we put that line across the river, we're basically committing to tying into a future regionalization treatment plant," he said. "The cost for pumping stations and maintenance of the line would be our cost, and there would be no expense to the city."

Pumping its excess sewage to Sandpoint's treatment plant would have been a huge plus for Southside. Because of its sewage capacity shortfall, hooking up to the city would have removed its self-imposed building moratorium which it has been attempting to rectify for more than two years.

John Tindall of Idaho Department of Environment Quality also thought Southside's proposal was workable and urged the committee to seriously consider it.

"You have the capacity to handle Southside's customers at you facility," he said. "They have a small amount of flow that would utilize capacity not being used by your plant during early morning and late evening hours."

Sandpoint generally declines to offer services outside of its boundaries unless it involves annexation. Westcott said the district has shown little interest toward the move.

"How I see it is this needs to tie in with annexation," said Councilman Michael Boge. "It's easy to allow others to use our capacity until it fills up. Then we have to go the people of Sandpoint and ask for more money."

Liability issues also surfaced on extending sewer service outside city limits. But city attorney Will Herrington said it would be more a contractual relationship public entity and a "long shot" to charge that by connecting Southside the city has to hook up anyone who requests the service.

"I'm sympathetic to their needs, but we're committed to customers in our city, 620 new ones and others who will be coming on in the near future," said Newton.