

Boucher announces stimulus funds for Yuma wastewater project

By Wes Bunch – Kingsport Times News – September 15, 2009

YUMA — Some residents in Scott County's Yuma community will have sewer service for the first time after U.S. Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., announced funding for a multimillion-dollar wastewater project Monday.

The wastewater treatment system, which comes in at nearly \$3.1 million, will be funded in large part by federal, state and local grants.

The bulk of the money comes from a \$1.4 million grant and \$400,000 low-interest loan made available by the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development Agency through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which Congress passed earlier this year.

"Building public water systems and wastewater systems have been absolutely essential to our growth plans for the region," Boucher said after making the announcement at the Yuma Ruritan Club. "We're enjoying great success in supplying these funds.

"To date, since February, we've provided more than \$400 million in funding from the Economic Recovery Act, and \$57 million has been for water and wastewater systems."

The remaining balance for the project was covered by an \$804,000 grant from the state, \$200,000 from the Scott County Board of Education, and \$40,000 from the Lenowisco Planning District.

Those funds will go toward installing 8.5 miles of sewer lines and three pump stations along Route 614 in Yuma.

The lines will service 100 residents in the community as well as Yuma Elementary School, pumping the wastewater to the Holston Regional Treatment Plant located near Weber City.

The construction will be done in two phases and is expected to take anywhere from 18 months to two years to complete.

Scott County Public Service Authority Director Dan Danko said the grants are necessary because the PSA would not be able to expand service without them.

"We're revenue driven based on our water bills and our sewer bills," Danko said. "The only way we can expand is through loans and grants. We can't expect to raise rates on people in Weber City, or another part of the county, to put sewer in down here."

Boucher said the wastewater system is important for the area because residents "rely on private septic systems, many of which are failing posing potential health risks, and the Yuma School relies on a failing wastewater treatment plant."

Scott County Supervisor Paul Fields, who represents the Yuma district, said the sewer system would keep the community's school from shutting down and allow more development in the area.

"The existing septic systems are not real good, they won't (pass a percolation test)," Fields said. "With this, we'll definitely keep our school here in the community, and it will also get people to build on property that's undeveloped right now, because with the sewer system, you can do that."

The announcement of funds was the culmination of nearly two decades of work, Fields said.

Although the funding is in place, Danko said easements still need to be secured in order for the installation to progress.

Currently, 35 percent of the easements needed have been secured.

"The biggest holdup for any project is easements," he said. "Especially with sewer, because if you're doing a gravity sewer you can't change the flows — you have to go with gravity."

The planned route for sewer lines often cuts through back yards where buildings or pools are located, Danko said, and many people fear that dynamite will be used to blast through rock, even though it is rarely, if ever, done anymore.

While there are still some details to work out, Danko said the PSA is already looking at ways to expand service even more in the Yuma community if additional funds become available.

"They may have some stimulus funds that may not have to be spent until September of this coming year," Danko said. "So what we want to do is get the designs done and get our application in and see if we can get some more money."