

Sewer study in works for Lenowisco region

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By

DUFFIELD - Economically and environmentally, officials at the Lenowisco Planning District Commission say the expansion of sewer service throughout Southwest Virginia is essential.

The district and the Mount Rogers Planning District are currently gathering information for the Southwest Virginia Regional Wastewater Study that, according to Lenowisco Regional Planner Lou Ann Johnson, will hopefully reap the same results that a regionwide water survey reaped during the 1990s.

"The Coalfields Regional Water Study supplied us with the information that led to unprecedented growth in public water," she said.

"With that tremendous impact in water, along with the attention we have gathered with our local and elected state officials, we felt the time was now to examine the sewer needs of the region.

"We have gotten a great collection of officials together for the study including regulatory agencies, county government leaders, public service authorities and others."

Lenowisco Executive Director Ron Flanary has noted that while 72 percent of homes in their service area - Lee, Wise and Scott counties - have public water, only 43 percent have public sewer availability.

He said that if the same results are achieved with funding for new sewer projects for the area, the region would see an increase in new housing production and improvement in the quality of water in the region's streams and rivers, and it would help solve some basic health issues related to current sewer situations in some areas where illegal straight pipes exist and place refuse into the ground or in the waterway.

Flanary notes that such contaminants as fecal coliforms and nitrates would be partially eliminated from those rivers and streams, and various endangered species located in the Clinch, Powell and Holston rivers would benefit from the installation of new sewer projects.

The following data shows a 10-year comparison of homes in the three-county, one-city region in terms of percentage of homes served with public sewer:

- Lee County - 1985, 15 percent; 2005, 16 percent.

- Scott County - 1985, 4 percent; 2005, 18 percent.
- Wise County - 1985, 26 percent; 2005, 46 percent.
- Norton - 1985, 92 percent; 2005, 100 percent.

Another objective that will be addressed is the subject of where the refuse from septic tanks is being handled.

Scott County officials have complained on different occasions about the illegal dumping of septic tank waste in different parts of the county, which at one point warranted a Virginia State Police investigation.

"That is something that we hope to find out, including either a locality's plant or some other arrangement that can be worked out where this waste can be properly and legally disposed of," said Johnson.

Current plans call for a draft of the study to be produced in September and an eventually final copy to be presented to the 2006 session of the Virginia General Assembly.

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