

# Two townships like idea of forming sewer authority

► *If the five communities that own the sewer system agree, they could take management control away from the county.*

## NORTH KENT COUNTY

The Grand Rapids Press

7. 24. 97

Sewer repairs amounting to \$10 million could be financed by a new authority composed of the five northern Kent County communities that own the system.

Creation of the authority opens the door to the possibility of removing the county from management of the system altogether, community leaders say.

Board members in Alpine and Plainfield townships Monday agreed to the idea. Officials in Cannon and Courtland townships and the city of Rockford are expected to review the concept of creating a new authority shortly.

"It may be better to separate ourselves from the county, and this is the first step," Plainfield Township Supervisor Robert Homan said. "We haven't burnt the bridge, but we've set it on fire."

Homan told the Township Board Monday that the communities have different

levels of dissatisfaction with how the Kent County Department of Public Works has managed the sewer system. Homan said setting up the authority gives the communities an alternative way to pay for the \$10 million reconstruction. It also gives them the opportunity to discuss a new working relationship with the county.

Rockford City Manager Michael Young contends that for 30 years, the Kent County Department of Public Works failed in its obligations to customer communities to adequately maintain the system. The county DPW should have recognized the deteriorating pipes long before the system started to disintegrate, he said. Within the past year, the system has failed several times, including a spill into residential basements in Belmont in December.

The county DPW financed the northern sewer system with municipal bonds in the 1960s. Those bonds will be fully paid off next May by the customer communities, the system's owners.

Young said he objects to a clause in a proposed contract with the county DPW for the bond sale for this year's repairs. He said the contract would have allowed the county to operate the system, but he held blameless against any problems, even if determined to be negligent, Young said.

An authority could sell bonds itself, without using the county DPW, Young

“It may be better to separate ourselves from the county, and this is the first step. We haven't burnt the bridge, but we've set it on fire.”

ROBERT HOMAN  
Plainfield Township supervisor

said. Selling bonds for the work would tie the five communities to the county DPW for many years, he added. "If things do not improve or we decide we do not want the county, we do not have the ability to change," he said.

"We don't want to stick to an agreement binding us to the county for the next 20 to 30 years," Homan added.

Kent County Public Works Director Curt Kemppainen said the county was willing to oversee financing of the repairs, as it has in the past.

But the communities are free to use their own authority "as a financing tool," though that could delay sewer improvements, he said. The authority also can't take advantage of the county's high bond rating in securing a low interest rate on bonds issued for the project.

The county had hoped to award construction contracts for some repairs in late summer or early fall. Setting up the new authority to issue bonds could delay that, he said.

"It does concern me that we're not rapidly moving to replace these pipes," Kemppainen said. "Our hands are somewhat tied until units of government make funds available."

He stressed that the county will continue to maintain the sewer system under existing contracts with the communities, though the agreements could be revised to better spell out maintenance responsibilities.

"How this authority fits into operation and maintenance of the program and management of the system, I don't know. There are a number of other issues that need to be dealt with," he said.

Cannon Township Supervisor Jim Alles said he would recommend approval of the authority to his Township Board because he said he believes the county was unreasonable in its request for the bonds to be tied to future maintenance.

"If we successfully create our own au-

# SEWER

## *3 other communities to review authority idea*

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

thority with little added costs, we'll be more in control of our own destiny," Alles said. "The initial step looks good."

"There has to be an understanding that if you're providing a service, there needs to be accountability," Alpine Township Supervisor Sharon Steffens said.

"We feel we have to look into financing because we'd like to look at options other than getting tied up with the (Kent County) Department of Public Works for the next 40 years," added Alpine Township Clerk Cindy Heinbeck.

Courtland Township Supervisor Jim McIntyre said his board will consider the proposal next month.

"We're not entirely dissatisfied

with the county, but we're only a small part of the system," he said. Courtland Township, which is seeing substantial residential growth, needs more sewer capacity, McIntyre said.

The authority would be responsible for determining the scope of work, hiring contractors and issuing bonds. The communities also have been discussing cost-sharing and instituting new cost reallocations based on flow. The current cost allocation system, Steffens said, needs to be updated.

"We feel we have to look into financing because we'd like to look at options other than getting tied up with the (Kent County) Department of Public Works for the next 40 years," Township Clerk Cindy Heinbeck said.

The boards Monday approved a statement of intent to form the authority. The next step is to interview attorneys and to determine bonding costs and the steps needed to establish the authority. Young said the legal entity recognized by the state could be formed within 30 days for less than \$1,000.

# City agrees to sewer authority

► *It's the fifth and final community to join the effort to finance \$10 million in sewer repairs.*

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## ROCKFORD

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The Grand Rapids Press

8.14.97

Rockford on Monday became the last of five northern Kent County communities to agree to establish an authority to finance \$10 million in sewer repairs.

Meanwhile, the city and Plainfield Township plan to move ahead with repairs to the Belmont bypass, a section of the system that broke in December and spewed sewage into nearby basements.

Describing the sewer line's condition as "precarious," Plainfield Township Clerk Susan Morrow said Wednesday that she was scheduled to meet with the township engineer to review costs and financing scenarios.

"My understanding is we need to confirm the financial arrangements, and everything is on hold for the Belmont bypass until the financial arrangements can be confirmed," Morrow said. "We will certainly address that as quickly as possible. We want that project completed this

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# SEWER *Rockford, Plainfield to repair bypass*

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

construction season."

Repairs in Belmont won't wait for the authority to be established, which could take several months, said Rockford City Manager Michael Young. Young instigated the authority as a way to eliminate Kent County involvement in financing repairs throughout the system. Many property owners in the five communities already are paying higher rates to cover the cost.

"If this isn't bid out in the next week or so, we're going to demand we take control of this bidding process and we bid this project out," Young said Wednesday, contending the Kent County Department of Public Works could have sought bids as long as two months ago.

DPW Director Curt Kempainen said Tuesday that he's reluctant to release bids until the financing plan is clear.

"We can't bid the project without having funding secured," he said.

Waiting for the new authority

to be formed could delay repairs, Kempainen said. Young said the legal requirements for creating the authority may take several months.

Once the authority is legally established, the five communities next must determine whether to continue maintenance through Kent County, hire sewer employees or employ an outside firm, Young said.

Rockford joins Cannon, Courtland, Alpine and Plainfield townships to form the North Kent Sewer Disposal Authority to finance the repair bills and maintenance.

Interest rates for bonds would probably be higher for the authority than for Kent County, which enjoys a top rating in the bond market. But the authority would realize savings by avoiding county charges such as administration fees and overhead costs, Rockford Finance Director John Strauss said.

"The additional fees, such as costs to issue bonds, are another reason not to borrow through the county," Strauss said.

Last week, Courtland Township became the fourth community to join.

"If the rest of the (municipalities) want to go that way, it's the only game in town," Courtland Supervisor James McIntyre said. "We don't have many options."

McIntyre said the decision by Courtland and the other communities to enter into their own agreement would provide "more control over the sewer system than what we have had."

He said the board's decision doesn't commit the township in the long run.

Young instigated the proposal, contending the county DPW failed to maintain the system, then handed the five communities a bill for \$10 million in repairs after several collapses.

"The county has completely failed to adequately maintain the system and, because of this, I believe they put us in the position we are in," Young said.

*Press reporters Tom Blossfeld and Keith Essenburg contributed to this report.*

# North Kent municipalities signed on for sewer improvement project

Resolutions from all municipalities involved in the North Kent Sewage Disposal System have been received by Kent County.

The county Board of Public Works will now determine estimates of the cost of improvements requested by the municipalities, and negotiate a contract between the county and the municipalities for construction and financing of the improvements.

Failure of the aging sewage disposal trunk line earlier this year affected the city of Rockford, and Plainfield, Alpine, Cannon, and Courtland townships. The improvements include rehabilitation and replacement of 5.5 miles of sanitary trunk sewer in Plainfield Township. The county will assist in financing the project.

# Mayor favors pursuing sewage treatment plant for North Kent area

**by Tammy Bergstrom**

Should the city and townships served by the North Kent Sewer Authority pursue construction of their own sewage treatment plant rather than continue to pipeline sewage to Grand Rapids? It's an idea that's been bandied about in recent months, particularly in light of tough contract talks between Grand Rapids Township and the city of Grand Rapids.

Rockford Mayor Neil Blakeslee, who has suggested more than once that the North Kent district pursue its own sewage treatment plant, voiced his opinion on the matter even more strongly at Monday's city council meeting.

"I'd certainly like to see a concerted study done (to determine if the project is feasible)," Blakeslee said, "rather than getting into another agreement with the city of Grand Rapids."

Blakeslee, who noted that he's been following the issue through City Manager Michael Young's memos regarding NKSA meetings, said it doesn't appear that the communities served by the system are aggressively pursuing building a treatment facility.

"Reading between the lines, it looks like you're looking at another 30 year contract," he said.

Blakeslee noted that the Grand Rapids system, which until recently was plagued with overflow problems, is nearing capacity and a treatment plant for the North Kent area will likely become necessary at some point.

Continuing the status quo — contracting with the Grand Rapids treatment facility — is "postponing the inevitable," Blakeslee said.

Young said there are a few reasons for proceeding toward a new treatment

facility with caution.

A new treatment plant would cost about \$30 million. The North Kent communities would have to come up with sound economic reasons justifying that expense. Young said current rate for sewage treatment being charged by Grand Rapids "is not bad; in fact it's a very good rate."

Currently, the NKSA communities are grappling with paying about \$15 million to repair pipes to get the sewage into Grand Rapids. That expense must be incurred because it's an immediate necessity.

Another issue is that the Department of Natural Resources' currently mandates that there be just one discharge point of effluent into the Grand River. Negotiating another point of discharge for a new system could be a long and drawn out process.

A third issue is that the DNR sets lim-

its on the amount of effluent that can go into the Grand River. In order for a new system to have discharge capacity, Grand Rapids would have to allocate some of their capacity.

"It's not impossible that that would be a heck of a battle," Young said.

The communities being served by the Grand Rapids system are negotiating contracts at various times. The contract for the North Kent communities is up in 2008.

Blakeslee noted that representatives from neighboring municipalities seem to be in agreement with building a new treatment facility and he reiterated his opinion that the matter be pursued.

"We all know the growth of these municipalities is going to continue," Blakeslee said. "When you've got everybody talking about it, you ought to be doing something."

# Joint sewer authority reviews choices

**by Marlan Buddingh**

Independent 1999

Looking towards the future, representatives from five area governmental units met together to discuss the possible connection to a regional system based in Grand Rapids or developing their own cooperative system in North Kent County.

Last week's North Kent Sewer Authority meeting brought together officials from Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield Townships and the City of Rockford. Led by Rockford City Manager Michael Young, who is also the North Kent Sewer Authority Chairman, the officials listened to two presentations.

Mark Prein, of Prein & Newhof Engineering, gave the first presentation, a feasibility study on whether the North Kent Authority could develop their own wastewater treatment plant. Although the entire project hinges on whether a permit could be granted to discharge into the Grand River, Prein felt that one could be obtained.

"They (environmental authorities) have given us our starting point," Prein said. "And we believe a discharge permit will be able to be obtained."

Prein described the location, size, method of operation and cost of a proposed system. Beginning with size, he said it would have to have a capacity of 12 million gallons per day. Presently for all five communities, the need would be for at least 6 million gallons per day by the year 2020.

The location and site needs for a sewer system were determined to be a minimum 24 acre site somewhere near 4 Mile Road and the Grand River in Plainfield Township. Any major distance from this location would add considerably to the cost of the project.

"The site location is very important in regard to cost," Prein said, giving a range of 33 to 37 million for the project.

In the second half of the evening, officials listened Young's review of the proposed Grand Rapids Waste Water Treatment Contract. The contract, which has been widely debated in a number of area communities, basically charges communities for connection and service by Grand Rapids' system.

One of the keys to the cost of the Grand Rapids contract is how soon a community joins. Between the years 2000 and 2005, the cost per capita to join the agreement would double, and increase at the rate of the consumer price index each year after.

"Over the course of a seven year period, we will be paying a lot," said Young.

Grand Rapids would use the money to build additional sewer capacity, and provide greater services to customer communities. Although most communities would be retail customers, the North Kent Sewer Authority would be considered a "wholesale" customer. To govern the agreement, participating communities would comprise 50% of the voting board.

Certain factors were built into the agreement which are intended to limit urban sprawl, by charging increasingly higher connection fees for low density developments.

"It's a very creative agreement, but also a complicated agreement," said Young. "There are a lot of variables."

Area township and City of Rockford officials will continue to study the two proposals, and work towards a decision based on the needs of the entire area.

"I think everybody would like to build their own sewage treatment plant," said Young, summing up the meeting discussion. "But only if it's cost-effective. We have to factor in the cost of service with the Grand Rapids contract."

Although Grand Rapids would like to know by this June whether area communities are planning to join, Young said that the North Kent Sewer Authority would make up its mind later, when they have complete cost data.

"We'll make the decision when we have enough information," Young said.

# NKSA to buy land for wastewater plant

By ERIN O'NEILL

The North Kent Sewer Authority (NKSA) has voted to purchase land suitable for the construction of a new wastewater treatment plant after several failed attempts to negotiate a new contract with the city of Grand Rapids.

Representatives from the five communities that make up the NKSA: the city of Rockford and Plainfield, Alpine, Courtland and Cannon townships, voted last Wednesday to move

forward in purchasing 28 acres of land on Coit Avenue, across from Coit Avenue Gravel, 4772 Coit Ave. NE, and next to Lamoreaux Park.

Though Coit Avenue residents have voiced opposition to a wastewater treatment plant at the site in the past, none made public comment at Wednesday's meeting.

"We have to buy this property," said Cannon Township  
Please see NKSA, Page 4

## NKSA

Continued from Page 1

Trustee Chuck Bloom. "If we don't, we're dead in the water."

Rockford City Manager and NKSA Chair Michael Young, however, said this doesn't mean talks with Grand Rapids have ended.

"We're going to execute an option to purchase the property, still keeping our eyes open that we can work something out with Grand Rapids," Young said.

The Coit Avenue property will cost approximately \$159,000 and the cost for each NKSA community is determined based on current flow.

Plainfield Township will pay \$76,814, Alpine Township will pay \$37,156, Rockford will pay \$31,242, Cannon Township will pay \$12,321, and Courtland Township will pay \$1,864.

A 6 million gallon per day wastewater treatment plant would cost \$37.2 million to construct, while an 8 million gallon per day plant would cost \$39.7 million.

The NKSA was formed in 1997 to deal with issues leading up to the pending expiration of the sewer contract with the city. Grand Rapids accepts and treats water from the NKSA communities under a contract with Kent County, whose Department of Public Works operates the system. The contract expires in 2007.

If the NKSA signs on to a new contract with Grand Rapids, costs will more than double, said Rockford City Manager Michael Young.

The NKSA determined property must be purchased before it reaches "a point of no return."

Young said Grand Rapids staff has not been open to negotiation.

Tom Newhof, of the engineering firm Prein and Newhof, said the construction of a wastewater treatment plant will take four years, plus one year for design and one year to be approved for a wetland permit and a discharge permit by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality.

Advance 3/27/2001

He said that with the expiration of the Grand Rapids contract pending in 2007, 2002 would be the point of no return.

The NKSA has opted not to sign a new contract with Grand Rapids because it would change the way flow is calculated. The new contract would calculate rates on size of property rather than amount of flow. Also, the NKSA communities object to being forced to sign on to an Urban Cooperation Agreement as part of the contract.

"That should be voluntary," Young said. "If it's worthwhile for our communities, that should be voluntary."

The way the proposed contract outlines cost of inflow and infiltration – the result of leaks in the collection system, of direct connections of buildings or other storm water drain – has also been contested by the NKSA.

An Environmental Protection Agency ruling dated Oct. 17, 2000 ruled that the city's proposed contract does contain violations. The city has appealed the ruling.

Cannon Township Supervisor Steve Grimm said negotiations haven't gone far with Grand Rapids.

"We're basically at the same point we have been," he said. "There has been a wall of animus that has been built up for quite a while for whatever reason," he said.

Engineer Mark Prein, with Prein and Newhof, showed data from the past two years outlining that communities who have signed with Grand Rapids have seen increases in costs while the city's rates have decreased.

Prein said that by 2012 it will be cheaper for the NKSA communities to have a separate wastewater treatment plant than to stay with Grand Rapids.



# North Kent group moves ahead on sewage plant

GR Press 3/28/02

PLAINFIELD TWP.

**By Matt VandeBunte**

The Grand Rapids Press

Four of the five North Kent Sewer Authority members on Wednesday voted to issue bonds for construction of a \$46 million wastewater treatment plant in Plainfield Township.

Plainfield officials tabled the contract and said they would bring the matter to residents at a special meeting tentatively scheduled for April 29.

The action comes a month after U.S. District Judge Wendell Miles dismissed an authority lawsuit against the city of Grand Rapids.

The five authority members — the city of Rockford and Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield townships — currently send their sewage to Grand Rapids for treatment.

They sued Grand Rapids last October over a proposed contract extension that they say unfairly shifts treatment costs to suburban customers.

The authority filed a motion for Miles to reconsider the case, but officials said they are moving forward with their own treatment plant.

"Four of the communities have committed to building a plant," said authority chairman Michael Young, Rockford city manager. "We've come to the realization that we're not going to get a reasonable agreement with Grand Rapids."

The notice of intent includes a

45-day period for residents of authority communities to referendum the bond issue. It also entitles authority members to opt out of the bond issue if their lawsuit is reopened, if negotiations with Grand Rapids resume or if state permits for the plant are not granted.

Plainfield officials said they promised to receive input from residents before signing on to the bond issue and going ahead with a treatment plant. The project must pass public inspection before too much time and money is invested, township manager Bob Homan said.

"We've got to make a historical decision for our community and we don't take it lightly," he said. "We feel we owe it to our people."

The proposed treatment plant has drawn concern from Plainfield residents over appearance and smell. A new facility would have to be designed with residents in mind, Homan said.

"The board is not going into this without the assurance that the facility will look good (and not stink)," he said.

The authority owns 29 acres along Coit Avenue near Lamoignon Park for the proposed plant.

Authority members have sent their sewage to Grand Rapids for treatment since 1968 under an agreement set to expire in 2008. Grand Rapids has signed a contract extension with several area municipal customers, but has not reached an agreement with the authority.

# Leaders wowed by new sewage system

► *The northern Kent County communities are considering the membrane bioreactor treatment for a new plant.*

GR Press 7/2/03

PLAINFIELD TWP.

By Matt VandeBunte  
The Grand Rapids Press

Five northern Kent County communities may be closer to building their own sewage treatment plant in Plainfield Township after visiting a "cutting-edge" system in Georgia.

Officials from the North Kent Sewer Authority — a partnership of Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield townships and the city of Rockford — recently toured a plant near Atlanta that uses membrane bioreactor (MBR) technology.

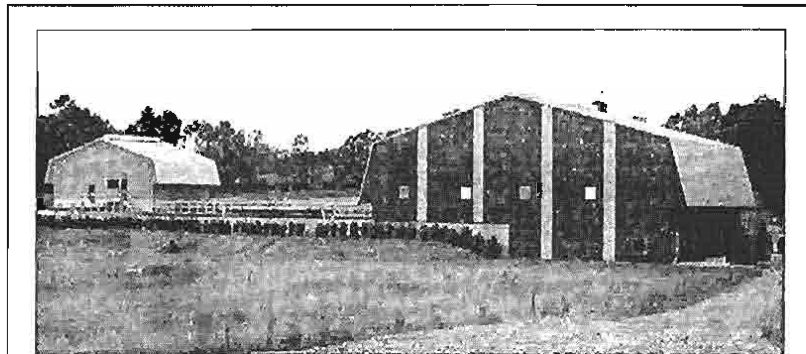
They say they are prepared to bring the new treatment method to a proposed plant on about 40 acres along Coit Avenue NE near Lamoignon Park.

A plant with MBR technology would ease the aesthetic concerns of nearby residents and meet the environmental demands of state officials, said Rockford City Manager and authority Chairman Michael Young.

"It looks like a farm," Young said. "They even had a cow, which we thought was kind of a nice touch."

"I was thoroughly impressed not only with the facility itself, but the MBR technology and its ease of operation. Right now, with the information we have, there's no reason why we wouldn't go this way."

Authority members in February decided to sever ties with the city of Grand Rapids by submitting applica-



COURTESY PHOTO

Local officials visited this membrane bioreactor sewage plant near Atlanta.

## COMPARING THE SYSTEMS

**Conventional sewage plants** employ sand filters aided by gravity to treat wastewater.

**Membrane bioreactor sewage systems** push wastewater through tiny filters that look like spaghetti strands. The filters separate solids from the water, which then flows

under ultraviolet light that kills remaining bacteria.

- The treated water can be as much as eight times cleaner than water treated at conventional plants
- The plant can be smaller.
- The process limits noise and stench.

tions with the state for their own wastewater plant.

The five communities have authorized up to \$50 million in bonds to build the plant.

The authority in May directed its engineers to research MBR technology, which separates water from solid waste by using synthetic membranes instead of the conventional method of gravity and sand filters.

Because the technology still is "cutting-edge," Young said there is not much data on operation and maintenance costs. But it appears an MBR plant would be cheaper to run than a conventional system, he said. It also would take up less space — as few as three acres — and produce a cleaner discharge into the Grand River, he said.

"The (treated wastewater) is substantially better than the limits we're

going to have to meet," said Mark Prein, authority engineer. "It qualifies as drinking water."

Authority officials that visited the Atlanta plant also said they were impressed that it did not look, sound or smell like a conventional sewage plant.

"There is no odor whatsoever," Plainfield Supervisor Dave Groenleer said.

The Cauley Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant is one of a handful of plants nationwide to use MBR technology. A similar plant will be operational this fall in Traverse City.

Authority engineers will continue MBR research as they prepare permit applications for their own plant. Authority officials Wednesday are scheduled to visit an MBR plant in Ontario, then tour a manufacturing facility near Toronto.

# Sewer technology to be put on display

The Grand Rapids Press

Jan 13, 2004

**ROCKFORD**

Five northern Kent County communities looking to build a sewage plant want to show they can clean wastewater better than Grand Rapids.

The North Kent Sewer Authority will host a demonstration of the technology it plans to use in a proposed \$45 million treatment plant in Plainfield Township.

The event will be at 7 p.m. Jan. 21 at Rockford High School, 4100 Kroes Road NE.

Authority chairman Michael Young, Rockford city manager, will provide an overview of the proposed plant.

Engineers then will explain the membrane bioreactor technology that the new facility would feature. The evening concludes with operation of a miniature treatment plant.

"A lot of organizations and entities are very interested in this project and wondering where we are with it," Young said.

The authority is inviting environmental groups, state officials and leaders of "downstream communities who have been affected by the repeated sewage overflows that are experienced at the (Grand Rapids) treatment plant," he said. Residents also are welcome to observe.

Treatment plants built with membrane bioreactor technology cleanse wastewater by using synthetic membranes, instead of the conventional method of gravity and sand filters. Authority leaders say the technology will have a positive impact on the environment.

# Wastewater treatment plant *Indy 9/7/05* poised to move forward

*by Jeannie Gregory*

With time restrictions looming on the horizon, the the Plainfield Township Board worked out a viable plan at their meeting on Monday, August 29, 2005. The board voted 6-1 to advance the North Kent Sewer Authority (NKSA) \$2.5 million to begin site work on the 30 acre parcel, located on Coit Avenue for a state-of-the-art wastewater treatment facility. The NKSA is comprised of the five municipalities of the City of Rockford and the townships of Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield.

When cost projections were submitted in 2000 the treatment facility carried a price

tag of \$36 million. A July 2004 projection set the figure at \$49 million and now a new \$51 million price tag has been projected by an independent consultant. To combat another referendum about higher costs the Plainfield Township Board also offered the NKSA a line of credit if the plant cost exceeds the initial agreement of \$50 million. Since initial planning each of the municipalities have assessed what would be a more cost-effective method to treat their water. The townships and the City of Rockford had to decide whether to renew their contracts with the City of Grand Rapids, or join forces and build their own wastewater treatment facility. It has been a see-saw

battle on what is best for all concerned as far as cost to their respective communities.

The proposed agreement is a way to keep plans in motion to begin site work on October 1, 2005 so that the plant can be in accordance with a completion date of November 2008. This is a necessity due to the fact that the City of Rockford's current contract with Grand Rapids ends in 2008. Rockford City Manager Michael Young estimates that the plant will take two years to construct.

The offer will be voted on by representatives of the City of Rockford and Alpine, Courtland and Cannon Townships in the upcoming month.

# Waste treatment plan approved

## *All five members vote to pass cost- sharing agreement*

Squire 10-1305

by BETH ALTENA

"We're at the point now, where, after seven years, we can make a decision," said Rockford City Manager Michael Young before the city council voted to approve the North Kent Sewer Authority (NKSA) cost-sharing agreement.

The vote to authorize the crucial document came during the regular Monday, October 10, city council meeting. It was moved by Neil Blakeslee and seconded by Janiece (Chi Chi) Rogers.

Rockford was the fourth member community to approve the cost-sharing agreement plan. The boards of Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield townships had already voted to approve the document.

"It's nice to be getting to this point," Blakeslee commented as the motion passed unanimously.

"This is a big deal, really," said Michael Young. "There aren't a lot of new wastewater treatment plants being built. I can't even think of when the last one was in Michigan."

Although the construction of the plant still depends on the bidding process and the final approval of permits by the State of Michigan, this is a decisive step toward construction.

Prior to the vote, Young outlined how building the plant will

Please see **NKSA**,  
page 7



**A BIG STEP**—Rockford City Council members vote to approve the cost-sharing agreement for the North Kent Sewer Authority waste water treatment plant. Above are City Manager Michael Young and council members Neil Blakeslee, Mayor Pro-tem Richard Mull, Mayor Steve Jazwiec, Mary Eadie and Janiece Rogers.

affect rates for Rockford residents. With the treatment plant options, the latest figures see a savings for Rockford residents begin in as early as 2008.

With approval of four of the five member community, the fate of the plant rested with Alpine Township, the most divided member over the issue.

Young was present at their board meeting on Tuesday, October 11, at Alpine Township offices to answer questions. The assembly began at 7:30 p.m. with a packed and emotional audience of residents.

Discussion began after board members heard heated opinions from citizens.

Following was a recommendation by an attorney regarding the township's options to break with the Author-

ity and a presentation by a representative of the City of Grand Rapid's wastewater treatment plant.

The discussion between board members was heated with dissension on both financial figures and opinions. Just before 10 p.m., with very little agreement, one member called for a vote to reject the cost-sharing contract. Three votes for and three against were cast, followed by a final vote against rejection.

The audience whispered in confusion, "Did they just say they were passing it?" one resident asked another.

A quick but determined motion to pass the agreement resulted in three adamant responses of "No," and four just as firmly voting "Yes," ended the question.

"I guess my biggest feeling is I'm relieved a decision has

been made," Young commented. "It was tough on everyone and now we'll concentrate on moving forward with the plan."



**DOWN TO THE WIRE**—City Manager Michael Young answers questions about the North Kent Sewer Authority cost-sharing agreement for Alpine Township board members on Tuesday, October 11.

# Cost savings sway the vote

G.R. Community News 10-13-05

## CITY APPROVES COST-SHARING DEAL FOR \$52 MILLION SEWAGE TREATMENT PLANT

BY MATT VANDE BUNTE  
THE GRAND RAPIDS PRESS

ROCKFORD — City Council members say the projected savings are enough to sway them to approve a \$52 million sewage treatment plant.

The council voted unanimously Monday in favor of a cost-sharing deal hammered out by five northern Kent County communities. They said the deal makes building and running the plant cheaper for Rockford sewer customers, compared to signing a new treatment contract with the existing Grand Rapids system.

"If we're going to save money by building the plant, then I'm all for it,"

Mayor Steve Jazwiec said. "I think we're there now (with the cost-sharing deal)."

Officials said the fixed portion of the monthly rate for the typical residence would increase \$4.23 in July 2007. The alternative is to sign a new contract with Grand Rapids, which officials said would hike rates by \$3.08 per month in 2007.

But the cost of staying in the Grand Rapids system would be 70 cents more per month than building a plant by July 2008, with that difference widening in future years, they said.

"That's only going to continue to grow," City Manager Michael F. Young said.

The projections differ greatly from numbers presented last winter, when officials said the fees for a new plant could jump to \$25.79 per month. Since then, the North Kent Sewer Authority has negotiated a cost-sharing deal that gives Rockford a break on its share of construction and operation.

In effect, the city will get a credit because its largest sewer user — Wolverine World Wide — pre-treats much of its wastewater on site. The cost-sharing deal also spreads existing sewer debt across the five authority members, leaving Rockford with a smaller share of its current debt load.

Young said the incentives were needed to get Rockford on board with

the new plant because otherwise the city would be better off sticking with Grand Rapids.

"Now, with this cost-sharing agreement, we've leveled the playing field," he said.

City leaders also said a new plant would benefit the environment by releasing cleaner water into the Grand River than the older Grand Rapids plant, which occasionally overflows raw sewage.

The authority — a partnership of Rockford and Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield townships — still needs a state permit to build the plant.

E-mail: [localnews@grpress.com](mailto:localnews@grpress.com)

# Sewer Authority sees half million in savings

by BETH ALTENA

"We are at budget if you are looking at a \$50 million plant," announced Michael Young at an August 3, North Kent Sewer Authority meeting. Young, the chairman for the authority, explained the \$566,000 savings.

In part the figure is the result of higher than expected income for the project. It also includes the difference between estimated and actual bid totals for the plant.

The authority has been in the process of nailing down contracts for the construction and engineering of the wastewater treatment facility slated to be up and running in 2008.

The excess funds were moved into the project's contingency allowance for any costs that should exceed expectations. So far that hasn't been a problem.

"Every time we have nailed

down a cost it's been right on or under budget," Young stated.

Among items coming in at the estimated cost are the land acquisition for vacant properties and homes on both the plant site and the flood shelf; preconstruction services; final design; general contractor selection; site design and work; and work on the flood shelf.

Still under consideration is at least one high-ticket item. The membranes for the waste treatment are estimated to cost \$8.2 million. Whether or not the authority decides to purchase the membranes themselves or let the builder purchase them is a more than \$400,000 question.

Sales tax of six percent will have to be paid if the project's contractor makes the purchase. If the authority purchases the membranes they would save the

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**GOING FOR THE GREEN**—News for the North Kent Sewer Authority PARCC (Plainfield, Alpine, Rockford, Cannon and Courtland) Side Clean Water Plant is all good, according to chairman Michael Young. At the August meeting the board heard about substantial savings on the plant. They also voted to install a green, rather than slate colored roof.



cost of the tax. According to Young, the issue could yield substantial savings or result in a wash.

"The authority would have to arrange for storage, and purchase insurance," he explained. The board will look into those costs before making a decision.

At the meeting, authority representatives from the five member communities, the City of Rockford and the townships of Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield saw the final exterior design of the structure. They also heard the latest in site construction for the plant property of Coit Avenue and the flood plain on Abridador Trail.

On the flood plain where residential homes were removed, 1,600 willow trees have been planted and will eventually result in dense vegetation.

On the Coit Avenue property, tree removal is completed and site work is nearly done. The artists rendering of the facility's administration building drew comments of approval. The building looks like a two-story home but will house a lab, a large meeting room, a small conference room, a locker room, break room and operation system.

Before the meeting's end, a vote was held to decide whether to have a green or slate grey roof installed. Green won by a margin. "If you have seen the Community Cabin remodel, you can see we put a green roof on that and it looks great," Young commented. "This is a beautiful design and we really can't go wrong."

According to Young, the project, in the works for nearly a decade, could still fall through. He said that if any of the items yet to be bid come through at way over budget, the authority could still "pull the plug" on the facility. That option seems less of a likelihood as the prices on the project continue to come in on budget.

Young summed up the findings, "In a nutshell, it's real good news."

# NKSA expects to spend \$49.3 million on new wastewater treatment plant

By CHRIS HECOX

Construction costs for a new wastewater treatment plant in Plainfield Township that will serve five municipalities are expected to total \$49.3 million.

And though the North Kent Sewer Authority - a partnership between Alpine, Plainfield, Courtland, and Cannon townships and the city of Rockford - is eligible to issue a \$44 million bond to fund the work it will only need \$42 million.

NKSA unanimously authorized the bonds last week.

"This is a big day for us," said

NKSA Chairman and Rockford City Manager Michael Young. "We've been waiting a long time for this."

Young said he is quite pleased with budget NKSA has assembled for construction of the PARCC Side Clean Water Plant Coit Avenue NE near Lamoreaux Park.

"Looking at the numbers we have, including \$2 million in contingency, we have a very good budget," Young said.

Plans for the plant call for an administration building resembling a residential structure to be located near Coit Avenue.

A machine building and reactor tanks will be located behind the administration building, near the Grand River.

The new clean water plant will rely on new membrane bio-reactor technology to treat wastewater. The new technology is more efficient than traditional means of filtering wastewater, Young said.

After the bonds are issued Nov. 2, NKSA will work to finalize the plant's design and submit them to the state for final review, Young said.

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## NKSA

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NKSA will likely hire a plant director by early 2007. The director would be part of the team overseeing the plant's construction, Young said.

In addition to the director, NKSA will hire six plant

employees and a clerk before the plant opens.

NKSA attorney Jim Scales, said the new plant should be operating at full capacity by fall 2008.

"We'll flip the switch on Nov. 1 2008 when the sewer will be diverted from Grand Rapids to the new plant," he said.

# Sewer treatment plant finally final

Sept 14/2006

***"It's the right decision to make for a whole lot of reasons," said chairman***

After eight years of struggle to solidify a plan to build a five-community waste treatment plant, the authorization to fund the project was unanimously approved on Thursday, Oct. 18. The North Kent Sewer Authority's (NKSA) vote gave the green light for the building of the project and assurance that no members can now opt out of the project.

For residents of the member townships of Alpine, Cannon, Courtland and Plainfield as well as the City of Rockford, the milestone is a boon on many levels. Nearly a decade ago, the NKSA formed in response to pricing from current sewer treatment provider, the City of Grand Rapids, which they felt was unfair.

Although residents in NKSA boundaries have experienced water and sewer rate increases, the new treatment facility will offer long-term savings as early as 2008. "Rates go up pretty much every year because of inflation," noted City Manager and NKSA Chair Michael Young. He said in addition to inflation, increases are part of the phase-in process for the new plant. Although an increase, the prices are nonetheless competitive. "It is \$3 a month cheaper. It would have been \$3 a month more

to stay with Grand Rapids," he stated.

Young said that after the current contract with Grand Rapids expires in 2008 there would have been more increase in costs to cover the expense of treating the four million gallons of waste per day generated by households and businesses in NKSA boundaries. "We are doing projections all the time," he noted. He said Grand Rapids will be investing \$200 million in improvements to their system in the next ten years. This cost will have to come from users to the system, in addition to other planned increases.

Young called the approval of funding a huge step. "There was always an opportunity that they could pull out," he said of the five participants. "We've locked in the fact that we're going forward with this plant."

He said the effort to make the plant a reality has been an eight-year journey.

"We've been in federal court with this, we've been to the Environmental Protection Agency... People are going to be very happy with all of these decisions," he said.

"You hate to go out and borrow \$50 million dollars for anything," Young replied when asked how the approval made him feel, but added, "This is the right decision for a whole lot of reasons."

Young said it is pretty incredible how well the city and four townships have worked together in this achievement. "We

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***"Right now when septic tanks are emptied, that sewage is spread on agricultural fields as fertilizer,"***

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—Michael Young

really have solid relationships," he emphasized. "Now the hard work starts," he added. "The next two years are going to be very intense."

As chair to the authority since 1997, Young said future steps of the board will be to move to a more legislative structure for operations of the plant. "Once it's up and running, we'll move the day-to-day operations away from me and the board," he stated, adding that the NKSA board will never completely dissolve.

Financial and environmental issues have been intertwined in the project from day one. Some members were more concerned about contributing to the sewage overflows into the Grand River, while others had more concern over saving cash for their consumers. Both issues will continue as the plant becomes a reality and considers taking on customers. Algoma Township is a future client of the plant, but other customers may offer additional financial and environmental benefits.

"Right now when septic tanks are emptied, that sewage is spread on agricultural fields as fertilizer," Young noted. "It makes great fertilizer but it's overused and it's getting into our streams and waterways. It's something that's been done forever, but now it's just overapplied." As farmland decreases and residential use increases, this issue will become even more of a concern. Young said the plant will likely implement a receiver station for septic sewage which can then be treated properly and safely.

"This is a huge problem in Michigan. That has to change," Young explained. He said the board would like to have a receiver station in the works immediately, but have plenty on their plate at this point. The board hopes to implement the septic treatment option within a few years of opening the facility.