

NORTHAMPTON

Sewer project angers residents

By LIZ DONOVAN
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An ongoing sewer project has Northampton residents demanding answers from the township's Water and Sewer Municipal Authority. Angry residents crammed into the department's meeting hall Wednesday night to ask questions about the Act 537 public sewer project.

Northampton's Act 537 plan was last updated in 1996 and calls for the implementation of public sewers in several areas in the northern end of the township, including Traymore Manor, Grenoble Manor, Harvest Acres and others.

Now, the Department of Environmental Protection is mandating that the township enact the plan and take care of its sewer problem.

Property owners will pay the bill, which in 1996 was estimated at more than \$13 million.

Residents believe that it is unfair for the township to expect them to foot the bill, especially based on a plan that is at least 10 years old. Many want the cost split among all township residents, not just those in the area that the act includes.

"Why do we bear this burden?" asked Christine Jackson-Mecutchen, to applause from the audience. "[The township should] fix it all and fix it equally."

"This is more of a community benefit than a personal homeowner benefit," added another resident.

Township solicitor Edward Rudolph said if the entire township's sewers were included in the project, the cost could increase, even if it is split among all residents.

Steve Hann, an attorney representing the special council for the authority, spoke to residents to explain the current situation and answer questions.

"This is not something that is unique to this township," Hann said. "This is an issue that we're dealing with statewide."

While Hann is looking into finding funding for the project, he urged residents to speak directly with the DEP about their concerns. He is working in conjunction with the authority to arrange a public meeting that will include DEP representatives.

"I want this to be a constructive meeting," he said.

Tom Zeuner, executive director of the Northampton, Bucks County, Municipal Authority, will post updated information and frequently asked questions on the Authority's Web site.

Residents are convening to discuss hiring a lawyer and setting up their own meetings about this issue.

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