



Barnstable Town Council nixes sewer projects

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June 26, 2009 6:00 AM

HYANNIS — The promise of federal stimulus money wasn't enough to entice the Barnstable Town Council last night to support a pair of sewer extension projects that would have cost homeowners in the affected neighborhoods tens of thousands of dollars apiece.

Following more than four hours of comments from an impassioned crowd of nearly 400, the town council failed to get the two-thirds majority vote necessary to approve \$51 million for sewer system extensions around Lake Wequaquet and Stewarts Creek.

The proposals, which are part of the town's comprehensive wastewater management plan, were too pricey and the town's planning was too rushed, residents said, prompting the town council to shoot down the projects in separate votes.

If the projects had been approved by a federally imposed June 30 deadline, the town would have received an 8.8-percent subsidy courtesy of the federal American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, which would have reduced the cost to about \$47 million, as well as a 2-percent interest loan from the state Revolving Fund.

With the discounts, about 1,300 homeowners around Lake Wequaquet would have faced a \$30,900 betterment charge to connect to the sewers, and about 320 residents around Stewarts Creek faced a \$20,500 betterment bill. The betterment charges would have been paid either in one lump sum or over 20 years.

"Can I put people in a place where they will lose \$300 a month on a fixed income?" Town Councilor James Munafo Jr. told the audience before casting votes against the proposals. "I'm having a difficult time finding a reason why."

Several councilors, town hall staff members and water professionals advocated for the projects, saying that the cost to homeowners would only increase in future years without the federal stimulus money.

Other sewer extension supporters testified that failing to reduce nitrogen loads in the town's groundwater by extending the sewer system could leave the town open to a costly lawsuit under the federal Clean Water Act. "If we don't do this, a judge will tell us how, when and how much," Wayne Miller, chairman of the town Board of Health, told the audience.

Many residents spoke in favor of sewer systems as a whole, but indicated that it is not an affordable option under the current economic conditions. Some even urged town officials to spread the cost to all town residents.

"We need to spread some of this (cost)," Diane Fay of Cotuit testified. "Let's share it because eventually (sewers) will come to Cotuit."

Town officials will likely revisit different funding options because both projects will remain on the town's wastewater management plan, which seeks to add 5,400 homes to the sewer system, public works director Mark Ells said earlier this week.