

What's in the sewerage contract?

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Here's hoping the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has some good sleuths on staff.

They could save some Pocono Township sewage customers a lot of money.

The township has asked the DEP to scour agency records regarding the municipality's new regional sewerage system. Township officials hope DEP will find some documentation of a commitment to the system from two large potential users. These include Pocono Mountain School District, whose east campus was expected to contribute to the system, and Great Wolf Lodge, a water park that is another large water user. Recently both entities told the township they would not hook up to the system, but would instead continue using their own sewage treatment systems.

Problem is, that leaves fewer sewage customers paying much higher rates. Pocono's projected sewer rates could be as much as \$1,400 per equivalent dwelling unit per year — 75 percent higher than the next-most-expensive municipality's residential sewer expense and easily more than twice as high as the county average of \$550 per year.

Township officials say system planners anticipated receiving wastewater from the school district and water park and designed its capacity with that flow in mind. Planning began several years ago for a system that would collect wastewater then convey it to an upgraded sewage treatment plant in Stroudsburg, which the Brodhead Creek Regional Authority operates. Pocono is contributing to the cost of the plant upgrade.

Certainly the township should have had such a requirement in writing before it moved ahead with the \$78 million project. The DEP had to approve the plan in its most minute detail, so project engineer Sam D'Alessandro was wise to ask the agency for the review. A reasonable question to ask is why the township can't point to it in a contract. If the DEP turns up nothing, affected residents and businesses will be getting a raw sewage deal.