

Who signed the sewer papers?

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Pocono Township supervisors made a sensible decision in moving tonight's meeting to the Monroe Campus of Northampton Community College.

They're expecting a crowd, given the bad news swirling around Pocono's \$78 million sewer upgrade. The project's expected usage has dropped by more than a third since it was first conceived in 2007, a development likely to drive up rates.

But a change in venue isn't all that concerned members of the public need to see tonight. Supervisors should bring all the pertinent documents, including the contracts signed when the township put its formal stamp on this costly venture. Any public improvement that costs \$78 million requires extensive borrowing, and the engineer's legal and financial documents for the final design warrant close scrutiny now that the sewer project is experiencing troubled waters.

Back in 2007, township officials predicted that about 972,000 gallons of wastewater per day would flow through the improved system, which eventually will pipe effluent all the way down to Stroudsburg for final treatment. But earlier this year, Pocono Mountain School District and Great Wolf Lodge water park both told the township they wouldn't hook up to the system. Officials revised the projected flow to just 637,000 gallons. That will raise rates for the remaining users, possibly to as high as \$1,400 per equivalent dwelling unit per year.

Municipal officials hire experts for a reason. Elected officials typically are lay people, without engineering or legal expertise. They rely on professional engineers to help them create public infrastructure plans that will work. Public works improvements are costly, so in this case, in addition to a sensible sewerage collection and treatment plan, they needed a legal and financial package whose every "t" is crossed and every "i" was dotted.

Somewhere, somehow, someone should have made sure the agreement required that all the expected system users were required to hook up to the Pocono Township system. Otherwise, Pocono Township taxpayers were looking at a "build it and they will come" situation. That's find for risking private fortunes, but not the public dime.

Supervisors and officials should put their heads together tonight and figure out what went wrong. A lot of tax dollars are at stake.