

Great Wolf keeps Pocono Township in limbo over sewer hookup

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June 07, 2012 12:00 AM

Pocono Township continues to negotiate with Great Wolf to get the indoor water park resort to hook in to the planned central sewer system, according to township officials.

Jens H. Damgaard, the township's Harrisburg-based bond lawyer, said the Scotrun resort has not made a final decision on whether it will connect to the system.

Great Wolf's status was one of dozens of points, clarifications and explanations thrown at an inquisitive public that has grown increasingly worried about the township's \$78 million central sewer system.

The amount of people showing up at recent sewer meetings had become large enough the township moved Wednesday's meeting to the Monroe Campus of Northampton Community College in Tannersville to allow additional access. More than 100 residents attended the meeting Wednesday night.

"This is to clear up the misconceptions and exaggerations," township Supervisor Frank Hess said. "To talk about the problems we do have, and the problems we don't have."

Township supervisors have held monthly, public meetings about the progress of the sewer system since construction began in 2008 with sparse attendance. Recently, however, attendance has ballooned with concerned citizens over the progress of the system scheduled to open partially in September, and fully in June 2013.

One of the biggest concerns has been the status of Great Wolf's inclusion in the project. It would be the second-biggest user of the system behind Sanofi Pasteur in Swiftwater.

Sanofi Pasteur, project officials explained Wednesday, was the driving force to get the sewer system built because it could no longer expand on its property without a public sewer system.

Without it, project officials feared there was a distinct chance the vaccine manufacturer — the second-largest employer in the county — could leave its Monroe County site.

Because of early negotiations, project officials said the Sanofi Pasteur is required to hook in to the system.

Great Wolf, however, is not required to hook in to the system because the state-issued permit of its functional, on-site sewer treatment system does not include a clause to hook in to the system, township officials said Wednesday.

Contrary to what supervisors have said in the past, there is no final decision on whether Great Wolf will hook in to the system.

A financial enticement

Damgaard said Wednesday night that officials from the resort sent the township a letter this week saying they were still considering their options.

"We were very hopeful, and remain very hopeful, they would connect," said Damgaard, who is part of the negotiations with Great Wolf. "We can't force them, but we are hopeful."

The township can't force Great Wolf, but it can entice them, Dangaard said. The main enticement is to come into the system now to save millions of dollars.

The tapping fee, the one-time cost to hook in to the system, has been projected at \$2,500 for existing users for every 250 gallons per day of sewer flow. New users, however, are projected to be charged \$3,750.

Great Wolf would use about 100,000 gallons per day, according to township calculations. As an initial user, it would be charged \$1 million in tapping fees. If it would come on the system at a later time, it would be charged \$1.5 million.

"That's one of the enticements," Dagaard said.

Many of the residents complimented the township for the depth and completeness of the presentation. "We wanted to be here and be crystal clear," Supervisor Henry Bengel said. "And we were."

More answers

Some other facts that came out of Wednesday's meeting:

- The projected user rate for every 250 gallons of sewer use a day is \$1,369. That rate has not been finalized.
- The user rate being paid, no matter what the final rate is, will be about 65 percent dedicated to debt service, and 35 percent dedicated to operations and maintenance.
- If Great Wolf does enter the system, it would knock about \$100 off the user fee.
- About 112 of users of the system are residential properties — about 3.4 percent of the total users.