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Pocono Township supervisor: We're swimming upstream in sewer project mess


 By **Michael Sadowski**
 Pocono Record Writer
 May 22, 2012
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When it comes to Pocono Township's \$78 million central sewer project — in the planning stages for about a decade — current township officials just don't have all the answers about how the township got to where it is now.

So officials want to bring in some experts.

Board of Supervisors Chairman Frank Hess said at the township's next monthly sewer meeting — scheduled for June 6 — he plans to invite some of the experts who can answer ever-growing questions about the system. Hess said officials from project engineer R.K.R. Hess Associates, lawyers for the project and officials from local environmental groups will be invited.

When members of the public ask questions of current township officials, often the response is: "It was before my time." Bringing in experts could clear up some of the public's issues, township officials said.

"We don't have the answers on who signed off on what," Hess said. "That's what we're trying to find out now."

The project has become a source of consternation over the last two months since R.K.R. Hess officials told the township of decreased projected usage of the system when it opens.

Because of that decreased usage, projected user rates have gone from under \$1,200 per year to more than \$1,400 for the average household.

The expense of the system prompted Great Wolf Lodge and Pocono Mountain School District's East Campus to avoid hooking into the project.

The township did get one sewer hurdle cleared Monday night. It voted to change a township ordinance that will allow developers to begin work on projects before the sewer system is ready.

Developers must sign a "hold harmless" letter that absolves the township of any financial or legal responsibility should the sewer system open late. The system is scheduled to open partially in September and completely next spring.

Previously, projects couldn't begin until developers had a "will serve" letter from the township guaranteeing them sewer service. But the will serve letter couldn't be issued until the system was operational. With the new arrangement, developers can continue before the system is open by signing the "hold harmless" letter.

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Sanofi has been a great neighbor. They give to local charities and they have provided jobs and income for thousands. However; Sanofi's need for public sewage fueled the quest for this new system. If I recall correctly; there were even rumors that they would move out - if the new system did not go full steam ahead. A recent PR story said that Sanofi was still committed to so much sewage per day. But; we have not heard if they are happy about the new proposed rates? We do not know if these high rates will force employers out of the township or even the county? I see people are moving out of our area because of higher property taxes. Additional sewage fees will not help the situation.

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