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## News

### Oxford mulls options in developing waste water management strategy

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OXFORD A force main pipe to Easton is one of the options Oxford is considering in its long-range plan to develop a waste water management strategy.

Residents heard Tuesday night from the town commissioners, environmental engineers and Easton Utilities regarding the options the town will have when it comes time to replace the current lagoon system. Talbot County Councilmen Thomas Duncan and Corey Pack were there as well, along with Sharon Van Emburgh, Easton town attorney, and Tom Hughes, member of the Talbot County Planning Commission.

One possibility is to build a 10-mile-long pipe from Oxford, down Almshouse Road, across U.S. Route 50 and along Manadier Road to the Easton Utilities Enhanced Nutrient Removal waste water plant, said Jeff Sturdevant with Stearns & Wheeler, an environmental engineering firm hired by the town. Estimated cost is \$10.8 million.

Hugh Grunden, chief executive officer of Easton Utilities, explained the ENR facility is only running at about 50 percent of its 4 million-gallon-a-day capacity and could easily handle Oxford's water.

One of the pitfalls the town hopes to avoid is encouraging development by building the pipe, but Oxford's attorney, David Thompson, said a legal agreement among Oxford, Easton and Talbot County could prevent that.

Sturdevant presented four other options as well. The first, do nothing, is not viable, he said.

The second option is to upgrade the current plant at an estimated cost of \$2.7 million to remove more phosphorus.

Option three is to build a new Biological Nutrient Removal plant for about \$8.9 million. The BNR facility could eventually be upgraded to an Enhanced Nutrient Removal facility, which is what Easton Utilities operates, or for about \$12.3 million, the town could skip the BNR and just build an ENR plant.

The town is weighing all its options and Tuesday's meeting was for discussion purposes only; any decision and implementation would not take place for several years.

"Oxford's lagoon system is tried and true," said Thompson. "(It) has been well-managed and it works well."

Planning began several years ago when Stearns & Wheeler was hired to study the town's future options for treating wastewater; the town's current system is 45 years old.

"Eventually the town will have to look at the waste water system and update it," said Oxford Commissioner James Klair.

Another reason planning started was because the current system pumps the treated water into Town Creek, a Choptank River tributary. The creek is listed by the Environmental Protection Agency as an impaired waterway for excess levels of nitrogen, phosphorous, Biochemical Oxygen Demand and suspended sediment.

The engineering report, completed in April 2007, suggested that all the options would be costly and the commissioners discovered the only way to qualify for state aid is to be part of the county's Comprehensive Water and Sewer plan.

In addition, grant funding isn't available for waste water facilities that handle less than 500,000 gallons a day and Oxford's handles about 100,000 gallons a day.

The Oxford Town Commissioners had an introductory meeting with the Talbot County Council and the council suggested the commissioners hold a work session explaining the options. The commissioners are scheduled to meet with the Talbot County Planning Commission on Feb. 4, then the planning commission will make a recommendation to the county council.

A public hearing is scheduled Feb. 10 during the county council meeting. Following that, it is up to the council to either include Oxford in its plan or not.



Oxford Commissioner Pete Dunbar addresses the town's waste water issues.

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