

## Sewer grant option on table

By **NEIL HUGHES STAFF WRITER**

MURDOCK — The Charlotte County Commission took a big step toward potentially addressing its water pollution problems Tuesday.

The commissioners agreed to pursue a state grant to build storm- and wastewater infrastructure in areas near Dartmouth, Easton and North Shore drives, along the Peace River and its connecting canals.

But even if the county were to receive the matching grant, which could provide up to \$5 million, there's no guarantee the County Commission would accept it.

The county could choose to reject the grant for any reason, interim Public Works Director Terri Kesner said. The grant would cover 60 percent of the construction costs to build the infrastructure. The remaining 40 percent, and engineering expenses, would have to be covered by the county.

"This is an area that needs to be sewered," Commissioner Dick Loftus said. "We are polluting the waters in Charlotte Harbor. The septic tanks are failing. It's an older community."

The commissioners, in a 3-2 vote, instructed staff to pursue the grant. Kesner said the county would know its status sometime in the next year.

Beyond that, if approved by the County Commission, the system would need to be constructed, at an estimated cost of hundreds of dollars per year, for 20 years, to affected residents.

Herman Velasco, environmental health adviser with the Charlotte County Health Department, told the commissioners of the need to sewer the area to prevent further pollution into area waters. Tank waste often leaks and infiltrates area groundwater, making its way into local waterways and causing a serious health hazard.

"We found the same percentage of tanks, between 10 and 13 percent, have been failing for years," he said.

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