

# County's push for sewer system not over yet

## Curmudgeon Corner

On April 20 the County Commission shelved the proposed installation of sewers for "Area 1." This action caused the county staff to cease further activity on this project. However the motion was amended. This called for county staff to continue searching for ways to obtain grants to help alleviate costs to homeowners in a future sewer project.

Why all the "hoopla" over sewers when the county's managed septic tank program seemed to be working? This program is inspecting all the septic tanks in Area 1 and requiring them to be either repaired or replaced if found defective. This program was implemented to assure that leaking tanks were not going to continue to pollute our harbor. This program will not eliminate all the fecal coliform bacteria finding its way into the harbor but it will certainly reduce it. During August of 2008 testing was done that found an alarming amount of coliform bacteria in swales in the Spring Lake area. Since the percolation rate of our soil is not very good then the apparent cause of this contamination was from leaking tanks finding its way laterally into the open swales and on to the harbor.

The quantity of septic tanks in Area 1 is a bit more than the available ground can handle (averaging about one tank per 10,000 sq. ft. lot). In areas of the County that have on average one tank per several lots the percolation works sufficiently so that contamination does not go laterally. The problem is areas that are densely populated will never work well for septic sewage disposal. As our summer rains commence the ground becomes saturated and the contaminants are brought to the surface instead of percolating downward from the lateral fields. No further testing has been done in the swales mentioned above since 2008 to determine if the managed septic tank program is working.

However a recent study by the National Estuary Program does show the harbor is trending downward in coliform bacteria.

We have been told that the state DEP requires us to install sewers. The federal government says our harbor is impaired. How do they know? The DEP told them so. DEP took samplings about two years ago and according to the Health Department here in Charlotte they will again take samplings perhaps in two or three more years. A waterway may be classed as impaired due to the water containing, in part, chemicals, nutrients, coliform bacteria, dissolved oxygen, etc. Even if we eliminated most of the coliform by sewerage we would still be classed as an impaired waterway.

The reason the state is requiring us to install sewers is because the county agreed to do so in order to be granted a permit to remove the Manchester Waterway boat lock. The permit was granted on June 29, 2007 and included the requirement to sewer in certain areas during Fiscal Years 2007 thru 2011. So far the only completed area has been an area designated CH-1 within the Charlotte Harbor CRA program. Charlotte County is obligated to install sewers in those specific areas as listed in the permit to remove the Manchester lock.

During the recent public meetings to explain the sewer program to the public it was indeed difficult to get answers to questions raised by the public. One wonders why simple answers to simple questions were seemingly not available. Until I started looking into this entire situation:

- I had no idea that the county had committed to install sewers in various areas in order to obtain the state permit to open the lock.
- I had no idea that the required sewerage in Area 1 in order to open the lock included only three small geographical areas and not the entire area between U.S. 41 and S.R. 776.
- I had no idea that test data of swales showing high concentrations of coliform was nearly two years old and done prior to testing and correcting septic tank installations in Area One. We are waiting on further testing for the commencement of our summer rains.

Is the push for sewers over?

Not by a long shot.

Watson is a member of the Charlotte County Curmudgeon Club. Readers may reach him at [curclub@embarqmail.com](mailto:curclub@embarqmail.com).

Dale Watson