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Lake residents appear happy with sewer project

By JAIME COURTNEY
Tribune Correspondent

DOWAGIAC -- The Sister Lakes sewer project was completed this summer, and most residents are not just pleased -- they are elated.

"I think it's the greatest thing since popcorn," said Ed Miller, who lives on Curran Road at Magician Lake. "It was something that had to come, sooner or later. I just wish we could have done it a long time ago."

Silver Creek Township Supervisor Bob Ausra, who also lives on Curran Road, agrees that the project was inevitable.

"It had to come," he said. "We were fortunate that we were able to get good interest rates when the bond passed two years ago. A lot of people opposed it, and there are still some unhappy ones, but I sincerely believe most of the residents are happy with it."

The project affects about 1,600 tap-ins, Ausra said.

Maureen Kuriata works for the Sister Lakes Area Utility Authority, an agency created to issue permits, collect fees and monitor the progress of the project. Kuriata said about 60 to 65 percent of the affected properties have completed their hookups.

"The remainder is not because of any resistance; it's simply that the contractors doing the tap-ins are so busy," Kuriata explained. "They can only get to the jobs so fast. But it's getting there. They'll soon have all the jobs completed."

"We were against a sewer project a few years ago," admitted Joyce Kier-nan. She and her husband, Ed, live on Victory Shore on Big Crooked Lake. "We had a good septic system with no problems, so we didn't feel any need for it. However, that wasn't the case with everyone we knew.

"Over time, we changed our minds. We decided that it was definitely coming, and if we didn't vote it in, it would be mandated anyway. So we voted, and saw the effect. I think it's a good thing. I think we'll see more building now, probably bigger homes with more bedrooms now that the worry about a septic system is gone.



Miller believes that a lot of people initially opposed to the project are now happy that it's done.

"The main obstacle to the project was the dollar bill," he said. "They just didn't want to pay for it. The whole project was roughly \$12 million, but some people paid their assessments up front, so the township didn't have to borrow that much."

Assessments were \$6,600 per tap-in plus \$10 per frontage foot up to 250 feet. These costs will be paid with taxes over the bond's life.

"Each residence also paid to have their own tap-in done, but that only averaged about \$600, not really so much," Miller added. "When the tap-in was completed and inspected, the old septic system was removed.

"Some of those people who had been opposed changed their minds when they saw what was taken out during the hook-ups. I have never seen so many 55-gallon tanks. They had to be leaching into the lake. Some had lines that just ended in a rock pile. One that I know of was just 5 feet from the well, and 25 feet from the lake."

Ausra speculated that three to five years will show an improvement in the clarity of the lakes.

"We were not in a crisis situation with our lakes, fortunately," he said. "The environmental impact will be less with wildlife than with lake clarity and water quality improvement."

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