

'Best news of all': Lexington gets OCRA funding for sanitary sewer project

Written by Marty Randall

Wednesday, 10 March 2010 00:00 - Last Updated Tuesday, 09 March 2010 16:19

Scott County Commissioners got what was described by Commissioner Bob Tobias as “the best news of all” during their business meeting on Tuesday night, March 2.

Melissa Woods, community development specialist with River Hills Economic Development District, and Larry Bower, president of the board of the Scott County Regional Sewer District (RSD), announced that the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs (OCRA) has awarded over \$2 million in grant money for the long-awaited Lexington sanitary sewer project.

Commissioners Tobias, Larry Blevins and Mark Hays have served as the sponsoring entity to request the funds. And none of them could believe their ears when Woods told them that OCRA is giving a grant of \$2,147,412 toward the total cost of the project, which is estimated to be a little under \$3 million. A total of \$82,909 has been pledged by RSD as its local match. Additional funding has been requested of the Indiana State Revolving Loan Fund (RLF), but news of its contribution toward the project had not yet been received by county officials early last week.

Commissioner Blevins, whose district includes the community of Lexington, was ecstatic. “This is terrific. This is such great news. I know River Hills and the Sewer District has worked long and hard on this project, and I am so pleased that it’s finally going to help Lexington residents,” Blevins stated.

Commissioners Tobias and Hays were equally amazed and grateful to OCRA for its contribution to the Lexington project. The community has waited about seven years for state grant commitments, through which household sewer bills will be held down in cost. In the previous projects undertaken by the RSD, some grants were received for projects at the Hosea Subdivision, Berna Subdivision, Richie Subdivision and the community of Vienna, but those projects were also financed through long-term, low-interest loans from USDA Rural Development. By OCRA stepping in and providing the bulk of the money needed to build the Lexington system, community residents and businesses won't be saddled with high monthly rates.

The last estimate of an average monthly bill calculated by RSD was between \$45 and \$55, about what other RSD users are charged.

Lexington is in dire need of a sanitary sewer system. Its Towne Creek has tested positively several times for E. coli bacteria, and families have suffered from percolating waste from failing septic systems for years.

“This has been a long, hard process for the (RSD) board, and we want you to know how much we appreciate your efforts,” Tobias told Woods and Bower. “We really appreciate your determination to get this project under way,” added Blevins.

Woods said that more financial information about the project is expected to arrive in short order. It may be possible, once all funding is in place, to let bids on the project late this spring and construction begin this summer.

The Lexington project will involve adding onto the present underground treatment plant located on the old Englishton Park grounds and installing lines to create a network that will serve each of the some 85 homes and businesses around the community.

If septic tanks need to be replaced, they will be under the terms of the project. Each tank will be cleaned out and inspected for condition and then hooked up to the new lines. Effluent will flow through the newly-installed lines to the treatment plant. Treated water will be released in Towne Creek.

This project represents a “first” for RSD, in that a treatment plant near the community being served is part of the project. In previous projects, lines were installed to feed effluent into either

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Scottsburg or Austin treatment plants.

Woods said the District will have until September, 2011, to complete the system.

While Woods was available that evening, Commissioner Hays asked her and Bower if the RSD has moved forward on providing service to the Green Acres Subdivision northeast of Scottsburg.

A preliminary engineering study was completed on that subdivision, Woods noted, but there has been no further forward motion for Green Acres. Residents there have reportedly been plagued by failing septic systems and mosquitoes which breed in the moist soil.

Woods told the Commissioners that an issue which must be addressed is the subdivision's privately-owned roads. Those roads have not been adopted into the county-wide road system because they have not yet been brought up to county standards. "You can't get OCRA money if you're dealing with privately-owned roads," Woods told the officials. Bower added, "If you want to adopt those roads, it would sure help (an application for OCRA and other funding)."

Commissioners reached no conclusion on that issue that evening.

They also asked Woods to find out about a road study that was to have been performed for Scott County by River Hills. She said she would check on that issue and get back with them.