

The Terry Town Council held a public hearing for the purpose of hearing comment on the proposed sewer rate increases. The following people were in attendance: Council Members Scott Christofferson, Neva Rathbun, Tom Magalsky, and Karlene Kinsey, Clerk Lynn Schilling, and Greg Steckler (Core Engineering). Mayor Rolane Christofferson presided over the meeting. Members from the public present were Joan Grammer, Marlin Cooper, Russ Waples, George Blakely, Scott Carlton, and Alison Barnard.

Mayor Rolane Christofferson welcomed those present and explained the current wastewater project and the need for the sewer rate increase. She then opened the hearing for public comment.

The following comments were made:

Marlin Cooper stated that he is a new resident and inquired if the existing system is in compliance? Greg Steckler stated that it is out of compliance and explained that the Town is unable to meet their discharge permit requirements. He further discussed violations the Town has received and how the system is very difficult to operate. He discussed how each cell discharges rather than operating in a series as was intended. A return to the lagoon cells operating in a series will help with treatment along with the UV disinfection that is being installed. The wastewater system has been designed for 20 year growth for the Town. Marlin Cooper stated he mainly wanted information but did say that the rate increase is a big deal for some people.

Russ Waples spoke against the rate increase. He stated that a lot of people are on a fixed income and social security has not increased as much. He further stated that the sewer rate has gone up 300% in past 10 years with no increase in income. People won't be able to pay and ultimately the Town will be on the hook.

Greg Steckler discussed the SRF loans the Town is obtaining that includes some loan forgiveness. He also discussed the Town utilizing some sewer cash reserves to lessen the loan amount. Mayor Rolane Christofferson discussed how the Town Council had refinanced the USDA loans that were taken out in the 90's to pay for the sewer main replacement projects. The refinance saved the Town substantially.

Alison Barnard asked about if a property owner is unable to pay whole amount one month. Mayor Rolane Christofferson discussed collection policy.

George Blakely thanked the Town Council and Greg Steckler for the information. He suggested that people start leaning on Washington congressional districts. He stated that a large amount of money is sent overseas and 35% of those funds were used for these type of projects.

Scott Carlton stated that the notice sent spoke of the Council's obligations but puts the blame on the residents to pay. He stated that the Town should not have done a 40-year loan through the USDA. He further stated that the Town has not met responsibilities for its needs for the sewer system, but it is not necessarily the current Town Council's fault. The Town has seemed to be kind of easy on the tax base over the years. He further stated that the Town needs to be honest of what its budget requirements are and what needs to be done to meet those requirements. He expressed concern over the 30-year SRF loan on the current project. Greg Steckler explained that most the components of the system will last well beyond the 20 years that the state dictates for the design, which is mainly relevant to population. Scott Carlton stated that he hopes someone has gone to Helena and pounded their fists and said enough is enough. He further stated that face-to-face contact is important. He encouraged the Town to look for additional sources of funding and stated that they cannot put everything on the taxpayers.

There was an informal conversation about the funding package as well as ramifications if the Town did not move forward with the project.

Mayor Rolane Christofferson read a note of support from Rich Miller. She also shared a comment submitted by Stephen Swarthout that he is more for than against the increase but is concerned with the significant amount of the rate increase.

Joan Grammer stated that she is more than will to pay the rate increase as she is able to afford it. She expressed concern for those on social security and stated that she agrees with the sentiment of writing to our Congressional leaders in Washington.

The public hearing adjourned at 7:05 p.m. (Rathbun/Kinsey)

ATTEST;

Lynn Schilling, Clerk

Rolane Christofferson, Mayor