

Residents question water project

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FRIEDENS - Residents who live along state Route 281 between Geiger and Friedens questioned the tap-in and potential costs to the upcoming water project at a public meeting Tuesday.

The Friedens water project will include a 12-inch, 13,929-foot water line connecting a 500,000-gallon water storage tank along state Route 281 to the Quemahoning pipeline's main line.

From the main line another line will be constructed to supply water to individual users.

During the meeting, engineers and authority officials wanted to answer questions regarding project rights of way.

"We want to try to answer any questions on the right of way agreements," said authority manager Nancy Aultz.

A common question among the 40 residents who attended the meeting was the project's cost to them.

Officials said there would not be an initial tap-in fee for residents who immediately connect to the system.

"As long as you connect to the system within a certain period of time - usually 60 days - you won't have to pay for the tap-in fee," Aultz said.

However, residents who wait to tap into the system until a later time will have to pay an initial fee. The fee would be determined by the municipal authority, she said.

It is not mandatory for residents to connect to the system, said Jon Wahl, engineer for Somerset Planning & Engineering Services LLC in Friedens.

Aultz said water service for residents who are connected would pay 60 cents per 100 gallons, with a minimum of 2,000 gallons a month.

Sewer rates would not be affected by the new water system, Aultz said, and would remain the same base rate.

Another stipulation that caused some concern among residents was that the project will only provide water to occupied property.

"It can only accommodate people currently living in a residence," Wahl said. "Taps can't be put on vacant lots."

Corinda Santangelo, a resident who owns property across from Culligan Water Conditioning, said she did not think this was fair.

She said her home caught fire and later was forced to remove it from the property. Now, officials are telling her she will not be able to tap into the system because her property is vacant.

"It's not fair if you don't have a house on the property, you can't connect," Santangelo said. "It's an injustice to the people in the area. If you own land you should have the right to tap-in.

"If you own land but don't reside there you're basically screwed," she added.

Residents who have intentions of building on vacant land in the future will have to pay an initial connection fee.

Wahl said the township is not allowed to build an infrastructure for private developments.

"You can't run water to undeveloped land with public funds just to sustain private developments," he said.

Money for the project will come from a \$2.5 million loan from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Utilities Service, Wahl said.

"Later we'll try to get grant money to help with the project," he said.

During the meeting, Wahl told residents the project "is a good deal and we can provide it as a result of funding."

The Friedens water project cannot begin until the Quemahoning pipeline begins, Wahl said.

"We're looking at starting this in 2008," he said.

Property owners with the pipeline on their side of the road will need to provide 20 feet of property along with 10 feet of temporary land for construction, according to Wahl.

Property owners with the pipeline on the opposite side of the road will need to provide a 10-by-10-foot square piece of property.

Aultz said the authority needs a total of 65 rights of way. So far, they have obtained about 20.