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Wastewater facility plans move to next level

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Staff writer

The city of Braidwood is another step closer to expanding its wastewater treatment facility. The city got the go-ahead from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) to take the next step to build a new facility. That step is to bring the plans for the new, 2-million gallon oxidation ditch plant to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA).

"The meeting with CMAP went well," Public Buildings and Property Commissioner Jim Hutton told The Braidwood Journal. "They recommended approval to [IEPA] with no reservations."

Hutton said the next step is waiting for the IEPA to issue a NPDES permit. NPDES stands for "National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System," and it regulates point sources that discharge pollutants into waters. That permit process could take up to two months. After that, the city can start the bidding process for the plant.

"It's a huge step for this town to do," said Hutton.

The city began to explore options for expansion of the wastewater treatment facility back in 2006, when daily flows began to dramatically increase in Braidwood. In September of last year, the council voted to approve plans for an oxidation ditch. The existing plant has a capacity of about 660,000 gallons per day. However, the plant is currently taking in nearly double that on a regular basis. Over the past few years, flows have drastically increased into the wastewater plant, with daily flows almost always at maximum capacity. Over the past five years, the plant has seen several surges up to 2-million gallons per day, and inflows of 1-million gallons on a fairly regular basis.

The new facility will replace the current plant, which uses extended aeration to treat wastewater, but will still use some components of the current system in the layout. The oxidation ditch is a series of rings that literally swirls the wastewater around, separating out the solid wastes from the water. From there, the solid waste is eventually turned to sludge, while the water is clarified and later sent into the Claypool drainage ditch.

The new system will be able to handle about 2-million gallons daily, which is more in line with what the city will need. The plant will also be able to withstand surges of up to 7 million gallons. The new system will have a 35- to 40-year life expectancy, and should handle growth to about 15,000 residents.

The plans for the new facility unfold in two phases. Phase I is for the proposed, 2-million gallon oxidation ditch. Phase II would double the size of that plant as necessary. Hutton said that Phase II probably won't need to be implemented for several more years.

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The new site will sit on seven acres straight west of the existing plant. That property purchase was approved by the council on Jan. 12 for \$315,000. The estimated total cost of the project is about \$17.6 million. Of that, \$8 million is expected to come out of the TIF fund. The remaining dollars will

be paid out through a low interest IEPA loan. Hutton said he's working on a plan to pay that loan off early, so that the city can save up for even more expansion if necessary. Hutton said the loan will likely be financed for 30 years, but he hopes the city can get it paid off in 20 years, giving the city 10 years to save money for if and when Phase II becomes necessary.

One thing the city is not planning on as part of the expansion is providing service to the proposed RidgePort intermodal facility. Hutton said that while RidgePort will need services, Braidwood's plans for the new wastewater treatment facility will only service the city itself.

In addition to approval from the IEPA, the city will need to keep the Claypool Drainage and Levee District in the loop. According to a Jan. 7 memo sent by the Claypool district to Mayor Sue Grygiel, "Claypool is focused on floodplain, floodway, and the cumulative effect of effluent as it is affected by the complete Claypool system. While most data submitted for your IEPA permit is sufficient for the IEPA, depending on your engineer, data that Claypool needs may or may not exist."

The memo continues, "Storm water and effluent flow, floodplain and floodway issues, and basic erosion issues at the point of connection to the stream flow are Claypool's main concern... Our purpose in doing this is protecting your rights for a proper connection and document oversight to support everyone if litigation from upstream or downstream property owners ever challenges any of us in malicious claims. It is not to hinder or impose duplicate costs in the permitting process. The better the joint participation, the faster, less costly, and faster the paperwork can be completed."

The water district will review information from the IEPA, then contact the city if necessary for any additional data. Hutton said that during the CMAP process, Claypool reported that they have no objections at this time. Hutton noted that the city has already contacted Claypool's engineering firm, and communications continue between the two entities on flow data. Hutton said sharing the information with the water district is a normal part of the process, intended to keep the project environmentally safe and keep things moving in the right direction.

The city hopes to break ground on the project sometime this spring. The entire construction process is expected to take about 18 to 24 months.

"I think we're doing the right thing," Hutton said. "This is the size we need, so we're moving forward."

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