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IEPA gives nod to new water plant

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Staff writer

The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) has given the initial thumbs up for Braidwood's \$17.6 million proposed wastewater treatment plan. Now, all that's left is to hear what the public has to say.

In an April 8 letter from IEPA Infrastructure Financial Assistance Section Manager J. Geoffery Andres, the IEPA noted that they had reviewed the city's plans for the new facility and determined the project to be technically sound and cost-effective.

"Unless new information gained from the public causes a reconsideration, the Agency will approve the facilities plan at the close of the public comment period," the letter read.

The next step for the City of Braidwood to make the Project Summary and Preliminary Environmental Impacts Determination (PIED) available for public inspection, as well as to hold a hearing.

That hearing is set to take place on May 11 at 7 p.m. at City Hall, during the council's regularly scheduled meeting. After that, residents will have a comment period of 15 days. During that time, written comments may be provided to the loan applicant or directly to the IEPA.

The PIED, which is available for inspection at City Hall during regular business hours, reports that "the existing plant has become undersized due to normal growth over the past 30 years, which has contributed to flow rates that exceed both the design average and maximum rated capacity of the plant. Although residential growth in the City has slowed in the past three years, and is expected to remain that way in the immediate future, the City expects growth rates to increase as the economy rebounds especially in the developable areas along the I-55 corridor."

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The new site will sit on seven acres straight west of the existing plant. While discussions on a new plant began in 2006, the city voted on the new oxidation ditch plant in September 2009. 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, and frequent surges up to 2-million gallons per day.

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 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-

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to 40-year life expectancy, and should handle growth to about 15,000 residents.

"We're hoping within probably the next two to three months, we should have everything done," Public Buildings and Property Commissioner Jim Hutton said of the planning process. "We still want to go out to bid... and have it started before fall."

The PIED document goes on to explain that parts of the plant and pieces of plant equipment, which were built in 1977, are reaching the end of their useful life. The IEPA concluded that the project will have no adverse, primary impacts anticipated on sensitive environmental areas, floodplains, rare/endangered plant and animal species, wetlands, stream crossings, prime agricultural land, historic/archaeological areas, or recreational areas as a result of constriction.

Earlier this year, the city received support from the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning (CMAP) for the project, as well as the Illinois Department of Natural resources.

Once construction begins, the new plant should be complete in 18 to 24 months.

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