

City-suburban battle 'Super sewer' wins partial OKs

By Tim Richard
staff writer

"Super sewer" moved a half-step closer to \$76 million in federal funding recently as a regional agency gave it conditional approval.

The seven-county Area-wide Water Quality Board recommended state and federal funding for a sewage treatment plant in Brownstown Township at Lake Erie, two sewer interceptors going north to Trenton and Huron townships and a major relief sewer through Novi, Northville and Plymouth Township.

But the AWQB also recommended local officials "diligently pursue the issue of whether the North Service Area (the area north of Plymouth) flow could be treated at the Detroit plant . . . or the Brownstown plant."

And a city of Detroit representative underscored the Detroit vs. suburbs nature of the issue by vowing to remain "steadfastly opposed. We can't accept this," said John McGrall, a Detroit representative on the AWQB sitting in for Charles Beckham, the indicted director of the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department.

SUPER SEWER is the nickname of a plan to

build a single large sewage treatment plant at Brownstown and to serve a 40-mile string of communities in the Haggerty Road corridor with a major sewer interceptor.

The project is the work of the Wayne County Department of Public Works and the pet of DPW director Duane Egeland, who has been steadfastly pushing the project for more than 10 years.

"It was what we expected to get," Egeland said of the AWQB's decision at the end of a nearly four-hour meeting last week. "The board rarely rejects staff recommendations. Many members were voting on instructions," he said, referring to McGrall's stiff opposition to a suburban sewage treatment plant.

In dispute is whether the north part of the project area should feed wastewater into the Wayne County plant at Brownstown or instead tie into the northwest Detroit interceptor and be treated in the Detroit plant.

There was no question, however, over whether the North Service Area sewer interceptor was needed, no matter which plant it ultimately feeds into.

THE QUESTION — at least in engineering terms — is whether the Detroit sewage treatment plant has capacity to serve the northern suburbs.

Detroit officials insist their plant has the capacity and that it would be a waste of federal and state funds to build too large a Wayne County plant at Brownstown.

Egeland, however, came down hard on this point: "We don't have the figures for Detroit. But we have them for our system. And we think ours are lower."

"There's no chance in the world we can get (federal) funding for the Detroit plant," Egeland went on. He added that extending Detroit sewers to pick up wastewater from the northern suburbs "will disrupt 20 miles of recreation land."

THEN EGELAND turned to the politics of the situation.

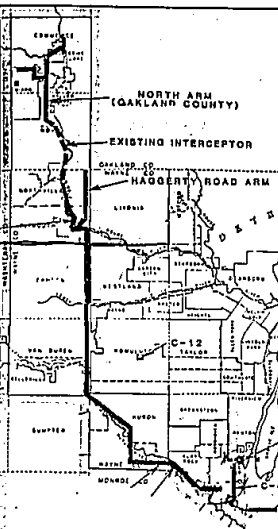
"It's somewhat amazing to us, after this (10-year) process, that these questions come up. . . Obviously, there are numerous hidden agendas. People have motives."

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