

Gwinnett County Government

NEWS RELEASE

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Board of Commissioners

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STIMULUS MONEY GOES TO THREE WASTEWATER PROJECTS

(Lawrenceville, Ga., Aug. 25, 2009) – Gwinnett’s Department of Water Resources has received \$18.5 million in federal stimulus funds to support three major wastewater projects according to Acting Director Lynn Smarr.

“Our County staff, Board of Commissioners and Congressional delegation members have worked and are continuing to work aggressively and diligently to get much-needed stimulus money for Gwinnett. These generous funds will not only allow us to operate more efficiently, but will go a long way in helping us to be more environmentally responsible,” said Commission Chairman Charles Bannister. “Gwinnett is rapidly becoming a leader in developing efficient and environmentally-conscious public projects.”

No Business Creek Tunnel: The largest of the three awards will allow the County to complete a wastewater tunnel now under construction in south Gwinnett. Commissioners have accepted a \$4 million subsidy and a \$6 million loan at three percent interest for 20 years. Two earlier phases of the project used similar low-interest loans from the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA).

Work began in 2007 to dig the three-mile tunnel through mostly solid rock about a hundred feet below the surface. It connects the No Business Creek pump station off Springdale Road to the Jack’s Creek Water Reclamation Facility off Brannan Road. The tunnel will transport and manage wastewater flows to either the expanded Yellow River Water Reclamation Plant near Lilburn or the F. Wayne Hill Water Resources Center near Sugar Hill. Life expectancy of the \$55 million tunnel is at least 100 years.

“This is one of a series of projects designed to improve wastewater service in the older part of the county, where we’re retiring three old, inefficient wastewater processing plants,” said Water Resource Deputy Director Peter Frank. “Our efforts to maintain our *WaterFirst Community* designation from the state by protecting water quality in Gwinnett have paid off with this grant.”

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Waste to Energy Project: The second major project received \$5 million to use methane gas from the wastewater system to generate electricity that will help power the F. Wayne Hill Water Resources treatment plant. Methane is produced in the plant's egg-shaped anaerobic digesters that process solids removed from wastewater. For years, such gases have been burned off as an unwanted byproduct of the process. Now it has become economically feasible to use the methane to power an engine-driven generator.

The money includes a \$3 million subsidy and a \$2 million loan. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) passed by Congress earlier this year requires the state to use at least 20 percent of its ARRA funding for projects that address green infrastructure, water or energy efficiency improvements, or other environmentally innovative activities.

"This project is one of our green initiatives and also part of our energy conservation program," said Smarr. She cautioned that there is still a lot of paperwork to be filed with the Georgia Environmental Facilities Authority (GEFA) before the project can proceed and that a "Buy American" provision could make the project unfeasible.

The Hill plant can treat up to 60 million gallons of wastewater per day. Later this year, it will begin recycling most of the highly-treated water back into Lake Lanier while about 20 million gallons per day will go directly to the Chattahoochee River.

Power from Grease: The third grant, \$3.5 million from the U.S. Department of Energy, will allow Gwinnett County to build a receiving facility at the Hill plant for fats, oils and grease – known as FOG – from restaurants and commercial food processors. Such businesses are now required to have grease traps to reduce sewer clogging. Private and commercial haulers need more economical, environmentally sound disposal options for waste they remove from grease traps.

The County will use the FOG wastes to help produce more methane gas to power its new electric generator. Smarr said, "The disposal fees and the power we generate will help offset the cost of providing sewer and wastewater treatment for our customers." The facility will also accept FOG wastes from outside the County as capacity allows.

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