

DCL Property Owners Voice Concerns About Annexations

October 28, 2004

Nearly 50 residents attended a public hearing this week in the Garrett County commissioners' meeting room on the proposed annexation of their properties into the Deep Creek Lake Sanitary District. The Garrett County Department of Public Utilities wants to provide sewer service to two new areas.

Area I contains properties at the Holy Cross Development site, Blakeslee, Penn Point, Paradise Acres, and Heron Cove. Area II includes lands along Mayhew Inn, Oakland Sang Run, and Bray School roads. The Area II line would eventually serve the southern portion of the lake, including Turkey Neck, Green Glade, and Hazelhurst, noted Mark Tonkovich, director of Public Utilities.

Maps of the proposed annexations are available on-line at garrettcounty.org/sanitary/index.html.

Tonkovich stressed that the annexations were important in keeping the lake from being contaminated by failing sewer systems.

"Long-term, you're just rolling the dice, unless you fix it and fix it right," he said about the rehabilitation of the entire Deep Creek Lake sewer system. He noted that the county's master plan calls for all lake properties to eventually be connected to the system.

Several persons attending the standing-room-only hearing voiced their opposition about the annexations to the commissioners. The residents noted that they already had working sewer systems and could not afford to pay thousands of dollars for hook-up fees, lines, user rates, and ad valorem taxes if they were required to connect to the public system.

Tonkovich said private developers would bear the cost of right-of-way and construction of a 4-inch pressure sewer line to the Holy Cross sites and a portion of a 12-inch line that would serve the Blakeslee area. The county would put in a parallel line to other residences with failing systems.

According to the Maryland annotated code, Tonkovich said, residents would be required to hook-up to the public system if their lands were adjacent to developed properties that were connected to the system. Additionally, the code does not allow the formation of "Swiss cheese" districts, where boundary lines meander in a haphazard manner.

He noted, however, that some portions of the two areas might not be developed, and some residents would not be required to hook up to the public system; therefore, they would not have to pay hook-up or user fees. They would, however, have to pay ad valorem taxes if their properties were annexed into the district.

Several residents asked about the amount of the ad valorem tax. Tonkovich said the rate would depend on whether the commissioners decided to combine the county's 10

water and seven sewer districts into one universal water district and one universal sewer district.

"I think public sewer and water are important," said Russell Sines. "My position is, simply, if I'm not connected, don't tax me."

One resident said that just because one lived at the lake did not mean one was rich.

"There is only so much a person can afford to do," said Carolyn Barnard, who moved to the lake 14 years ago. "I don't want to be forced to move because I can't afford my home. That's not why I moved here." If her property is annexed, she will have to pay for a 400-foot line to her home, she noted, along with other fees.

Grace Pennington, Bray School Road, said she was on a fixed income. "Where are the ordinary workers and the retired going to get the money?" she asked. She urged the commissioners to help out all of the people, not just the rich ones.

Tonkovich said the Garrett County Health Department "strongly" supported the extension of a public system to Area I.

"Area I has residences that have experienced difficulties with their septic systems and includes old systems with a very limited repair area," wrote Steve Sherrard, director of Environmental Health, in a letter to Tonkovich. "A public sewer system serving this area would clearly alleviate existing problems and prevent any problems with failing systems or ground water contamination. It would also protect the water of Deep Creek Lake, an extremely valuable recreational resource."

Sherrard also wrote, "Area II is adjacent to an existing sewer line and contains properties with soils that do not perc well. Since some of the infrastructure is already present in this area, Environmental Health Services has no objection to the extension of sewer service to these properties."

Kyle Newsome was in favor of the annexation. He would like to build on his Area II property, located near the DCL wastewater treatment plant, but his land will not perc. His only option, he said, was a public system.

"I'm not the only one benefiting from this," he said, noting that property values would go up.

Tom Sheahan, representing Four Hoopole property owners, said his community had already paid for its own high-quality, self-contained sewer system. He said there was no purpose in bringing the public lines to his community, adding that it seemed this was only being done for the Holy Cross developers' benefit.

Gary Daum, a partner in the Holy Cross project, indicated that everyone within three or four miles of the lake had a stake in its welfare. Something had to be done, he said,

about the failing systems and the drainage into the lake "before the goose that laid the golden egg gets cooked."

Additionally, if people with failing systems cannot connect to a public one, he noted, they will have to abandon their properties.

"I don't know what the answer is for those who can't afford to hook up," he added.

"We will take this under advisement for at least a couple of weeks before a decision is made," said Commissioner Ernie Gregg about the annexations. "Obviously, some reconfiguration to these plans is needed, based on what we've heard here today."

The commissioners will hold another public hearing in the near future in an attempt to answer some of the questions that were raised this week, before making a final decision on the annexations.