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Ridgefield Park to upgrade its sewer system

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According to Ridgefield Park Mayor George Fosdick, one of the biggest challenges that the village will face over the next couple of years is the task of upgrading its 100-year-old sewer systems.

Recently there have been new federal and state requirements made that will require the village to make changes to its combined sewer systems to cut down on pollution in the Hackensack River.

Over the next five years, the river, which borders the village on three different sides, must be clean enough for swimming and fishing, according to the new requirements.

"You can talk about how this is unrealistic, but they have come up with a program which gives us five years to come up with a way to fix this problem," said Fosdick at the Jan. 26 council meeting. "With all the other problems we have going on in the village, one of the biggest challenges we have over the next 20 to 30 years is with our combined sewer systems."

While this project will not use any taxpayer money, it is a very costly process that could run anywhere from \$80 million to \$200 million dollars. Ridgefield Park will pay for this project with money acquired through the sale of village properties, said Commissioner Maggie Boyd.

Fosdick explained at the Jan. 26 meeting what it means to have a combined sewer system. "In a combined sewer system, what normally gets flushed down the toilet goes into the same pipe as the rain water and then it all goes to the BCUA (Bergen County Utility Authority) to be cleaned," he said. "Then when it rains or snows, the system becomes overcharged. We have throughout the village six combined sewer outfalls so when the system is overcharged, the overcharge goes into those wards. Now we have to develop a way to

monitor this."

In order to cut down on some of the cost, Ridgefield Park has joined with Hackensack, Fort Lee and other Bergen County towns to work on this problem. It is also working with the Passaic Valley Sewerage Commission, which specializes in this issue.

Engineers have devised three ways the village can upgrade their sewer system. The first is through a very expensive purification system that would be placed into each outfall.

Another alternative is to dig up all the streets and separate the sewer systems. However, Fosdick explained that this would not make any difference when it comes to water pollution.

"We have been told that we can eliminate all of our combined sewer systems and there will be no measurable impact on the quality of the water around us because the principal source of pollutants in the river is from groundwater runoff," said Fosdick.

The third alternative appears to be the best solution to this problem, he said. That plan involves building massive holding tanks so when overflows occur, the water will be collected into the tanks and will remain there until the rain or snowstorm is over and then slowly released back into the system.

Now the village commissioners need to decide where to place these holding tanks. While they have a few ideas in mind, they still have a lot more research to do.

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