

Lehigh Acres sewer line project to cost most homeowners about \$1,000 a year

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A plan to connect 166 Lehigh Acres properties to existing sewer lines will cost most of the homeowners \$985 a year if they finance the cost over 20 years, according to the preliminary assessment roll compiled by the Florida Governmental Utility Authority.

That's enough money each year to fill a car's 15-gallon gasoline tank 27 times at \$2.40 a gallon.

The roll is included in the mandatory connection plan that will be presented Thursday to FGUA's board of directors.

FGUA's board meets at 1 p.m. at the Majestic Golf Course on Homestead Road South.

The annual payment would be added to the property tax bill. Payments include interest at 6.45 percent and would total \$19,780 over 20 years.

The plan estimates the cost of hooking up will be \$5,940 including the septic tank collapse and piping from the house to the line.

FGUA's staff is proposing the utility finance up to \$3,000 of the costs of to collapse a septic tank and to install and connect the pipe from the house to the connection point.

Costs will be higher for about 40 of the properties because laterals, or connection points, must be added to the sewer lines. The installation cost ranges from \$2,000 for two properties to \$13,725 for three of them. The cost will be under \$3,500 for 24 parcels and between \$5,360 and \$8,000 for 13 properties.

Other proposed payment options include paying the cost all at once, paying monthly over two years without interest and paying over five years without interest for those who qualify as a hardship case.

The overall cost is estimated at about \$1.8 million. FGUA will tap existing reserves or borrow as necessary to pay the costs, according to the proposed plan. The cost of borrowing the money will be passed on to the connecting property owners.

The meeting originally was scheduled to be held in Golden Gate near Naples, where FGUA also owns a utility, but it was moved to Lehigh because of the mandatory connection program vote, FGUA spokeswoman Barbara Kerby said.

If you'd like to talk to the News Star about this plan, please call staff writer Don Ruane at 344-4716.

The annual assessment will be hard to pay, according to Sharie Zipperer, who is one of the homeowners who will have to connect after living in the Woodridge subdivision area for 13 years.

"There's no extra money. There's absolutely nothing. This doesn't make sense when people are trying to recoup," said Zipperer, whose husband provides the family's only income.

She lives on Fargo Drive, a street she estimated has about 50 houses. Of those, about 10 are vacant because of the economy, she said.

FGUA should wait another year and give the economy a chance to recover, she said.

The assessment plus the lower prices for nicer homes elsewhere in Lee County will discourage people from moving to Lehigh, Zipperer said.

She plans to attend Thursday's meeting.

"I'll make sure I'll be there," Zipperer said.