



City's Sewer System Is in Need of Funds, Says City Manager

By *Barbara Llewellyn*
HIGH SPRINGS — The ongoing cost of the sewer system was the focus of the city commission workshop held on Feb. 20. The workshop was requested by City Manager Ed Booth in preparation for the budget process that will begin in April. The grinder pumps that were installed system-wide during the construction of

Phases 1 to 3 are the cause of continued problems and costs according to Booth. They are failure prone and of the approximately 900 pumps in the system, 425 have failed from 2013 to date. The annual cost for replacement and repair is \$40,000, he said. The city owns the pumps and is therefore responsible for their maintenance, repair or replacement, he said. *See Sewer System, Page 8*

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and replacement. It is now unclear why a system using the pumps was originally recommended and designed. Some more recent housing developments in the city use a less expensive gravity system. Booth says all future development will use a gravity rather than the grinder pump system. "We're doing what we can to get through this year, but next year is going to be a problem," he said. The bond issue that, in part, funded the existing system requires that a maintenance fund be set up to provide for repair, but the city has never provided the money for the fund. Booth will recommend

raising the money for the fund with a charge of \$3 to \$5 per month fee that will be added to city utility bills. A question for the commission to resolve will be whether or not all the city utility users will be charged the fee or only those who are hooked up to the existing system.

The Springs Protection Act is currently being considered by the Florida legislature. It is moving quickly with the support of both Republicans and Democrats. It will make between \$250 million and \$350 million available to municipalities for the funding of central sewer systems. "It's not an unfunded mandate," Booth commented.

In its current form the Act will require that all houses on less than one acre have either an enhanced septic system or a hookup to a central sewer system. "I want to be at the door, the first in line for the money," says Booth. "We have shovel-ready projects that are set to go. Thirty million dollars will allow us to do what we need to do."

"Another sewer-related issue that the commission needs to resolve is the system hook-up by 90 homeowners who were either skipped during the construction phases or who refused to give permission to be hooked up. Under state and *See Sewer System, next page*

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Final ad and copy deadline for the March issue is February 30

March 2014



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local law all homes within 200 feet of a sewer line must hook up to the line. The city has not enforced that requirement.

At the workshop Commissioner Scott Jamison expressed his dismay that the law had never been enforced. "I don't know why we're even talking about it. It's the law," he said.

Booth said given the past controversy about the sewer system and its construction, the issue has always been a

sensitive one.

In a recent interview Booth said he will ask the commission to direct him to write a letter to all residents hooked up to the system but within 200 feet of a sewer line informing them that they must hook up to it. The hook-up would be at the property owner's own expense.

However, Booth said there would be a delay in the enforcement of the law to see if the money will become available to the city with the

funding of the Springs Protection Act.

It would be unfair, he said, to force property owners to pay for the hook up and then possibly have public funds available for the same purpose soon after.

The issue of an additional monthly fee will be discussed in depth during the upcoming budget process. The enforcement of the hook-up requirement will also be discussed in future commission meetings.