

## WHY ARE SEWER RATES WHAT THEY ARE?

In order to answer this question, a little history lesson is in order. In 1999, the City of Grand Rapids came to the communities that make up the North Kent Sewer Authority with a proposal that would drastically change the relationship those communities had with the City. Up until that time, the City charged the communities for collection and treatment of sewage based on volume. The City changed that approach and proposed to charge for connections and acreage. This would have seriously and negatively impacted Cannon and the other NKSA members by putting great pressure on us to increase the density of our development. In other words, the City would have forced Cannon to have much smaller lot sizes and greater density. And, it would have cost much more than building our own NKSA treatment plant.

By 2000, when I was first elected Cannon Supervisor, it was clear that the communities could not work out a deal, and that we would not allow the City of Grand Rapids to dictate terms to us. We set in motion a plan to gain ownership of our system and the right to control that system. Back then, at least in Cannon, rates were quite low. In 2001, quarterly rates were \$43.00.

The member communities knew that we would not be able to raise the capital necessary to build the NKSA plant by the time it was scheduled to be completed in 2008. We knew that bonding would be the best option, so we were able to keep our rates low, saving users millions of dollars.

We knew, however, that at some point, increases would be inevitable. Thus, rates started their inevitable increases in 2005 to \$60.00 per quarter and to \$70.00 per quarter in 2007.

The treatment plant project was completed millions of dollars under budget. Cannon therefore was able to use a portion of the remaining bond monies to rebuild aging lift stations and proactively protect the lakes, without a massive rate increase.

Because we manage the system effectively and efficiently, our current rate of \$120.00 per quarter is drastically lower than if we had remained with the City of Grand Rapids.

We are now faced with issues that come with ownership of a 35 year old collection system. Cannon recently established a new sewer committee made up of board members and community representatives who actually pay a sewer bill, our consulting engineers, and the Director of the Clean Water Plant. That committee, which will meet monthly, is in the process of aggressively developing a plan to be proactive in the maintenance of our system, so that we can avoid reacting to disastrous failure. Because we do not want to obtain bonding every time a project will be done, we are looking at small, cost of living increases in rates, which in ten years will yield a quarterly rate less than the rates currently paid by some communities still with the City of Grand Rapids.

There are things you can do to help to minimize rate pressures. For example, some people on sewer have sump pumps connected to the sanitary sewer system. That water, which is clean ground water, is sent to the Clean Water Plant to be treated, just like sewage. Sump pumps should be connected to the storm sewer or discharged into your

yard. These connections add up and add to Cannon's share of the total costs of treatment, which means every sewer user in Cannon pays more. It is up to you to identify if this applies to you, and to decide if you want to correct it. Cannon Township will not come into your house and force you to do anything. That is not our role.

There are other issues that similarly add up, like downspouts connected to sanitary sewer. If enough people identify and correct these issues, we can significantly reduce the pressure on rates.

If you want more information on what you can do to keep rates down, call me at the Township, 874-6966.