

**A Compilation of Questions and Answers
regarding the approved project
to transition the Wolfe Runne community
from Private septic systems to the County Sewer District**

The following documents are excerpts from communication between the Wolfe Runne Board of Directors and the Sussex County Engineer, taking place over the past 2 ½ years.

This compilation starts with the latest series of Q&A, and projects backwards chronologically to the initial set posed in 2017. Please review the document, with the understanding that the later (those posed in 2019) questions and answers present the most current status of the project.

The question topics were derived from Board member input and homeowners' concerns. You will note that some of the issues and answers have changed over time, as the County has had time to further evaluate and study the project. Also, financial requirements and project engineering changes have modified some of the projected charges and implementation dates.

If there are any additional questions and/or concerns, please contact the WRHOA Sewers and Roads Committee by email at: sewers@wolferunne.org.

Thank you,

David Zorb and Keith Parcell

Co-chairs, WRHOA Sewers and Roads Committee

**Questions and Answers for/from Sussex County Engineer
Regarding Wolfe Runne Sewers and Roads
November 5, 2019**

- 1. Can homeowners have input on where their pipes join the sewer lines? One homeowner, who lives on a corner lot, said his septic is on his house's side and it would be simpler for him to run his connecting line to the side street vs. the street his house faces.**

Answer: Affirmative on property owner input. We will try to make contact with each homeowner in the design process to determine the best lateral placement. If they are missed, we will coordinate during construction.

- 2. True or False - Other than the main sewer line that joins WR to the Gills Neck sewer line - all other sewer lines in WR will be beneath the roadways and will not be the grassy road shoulders.**

Answer: True for the gravity sewer (majority of WR) but may not be true segments at the lower-far end of Ketch Court and all of Yawl Court depending on where the other existing utilities are.

- 3. Do you anticipate any driveways being disturbed by the construction and if disturbed, will the County restore the driveway? We have a few that have pavers between the roadway and the asphalt or stone driveway.**

Answer: No driveway disturbance for the gravity section (majority of WR) but possibly for lower-far end of Ketch Court and all of Yawl Court, if the sewer line ends up in the shoulder. If the driveway is disturbed the County will do the restoration in accordance with current DelDOT standards & at the County's expense.

- 4. Once the next phase of design is complete, will the HOA be able to see and share the design with the homeowners so they will have a general feel for where the lines will run and where the County is planning for each homeowner to connect into the sewer lines?**

Answer: We will definitely make the drawings available. I suggest the HOA appoints a liaison who is part of the design team.

**Questions and Answers for/from Sussex County Engineer
Regarding Wolfe Runne Sewers and Roads
October 9, 2019**

**(At this point, the project has been approved and funded. Start Date – Fall
2020)**

- 1. What is a reasonable estimate for completion of construction? Nine months from start date? Twelve months?**

Answer: We plan to advertise for a 12-months overall project duration, on site will be more like 9-months.

- 2. When do members become liable for the increase in their annual tax bill to begin repaying the loan amount? In the tax year following: - loan closing? - construction beginning? - declaration the system is operational?**

Answer: County Code, § 110-85, Collection of assessment fees, B. A parcel, whether vacant or occupied, shall become liable for a sanitary sewer assessment fee when a connection from the sewer main is or can be made to the parcel. This may trigger a partial bill or be added to next year's bill depending on the actual completion date.

- 3. When do members become liable for the quarterly service charge? Once the system has been declared complete & operational or upon hook-up?**

Answer: All property owners will receive a letter stating sewer service is available as per County Code, § 110-5, Connection to public sewer required. At that point the owner has 120 days to physically connect. Sewer service billing starts the quarter following the actual connection; the first billing may include a partial prior quarter based on actual timing.

- 4. True or False - Undeveloped lots are liable for the loan repayment, but not the quarterly service charge?**

Answer: That is a true statement per County Code.

- 5. When will the Association be able to review a final construction plan that will inform:**

- a. the general process for where & when construction will occur within the community?
- b. how the roads will be affected by construction (to inform traffic flow concerns & re-asphalting)?

Answer: We expect to have engineering drawings, of sufficient detail, available by the end of the year. At that point we will engage the HOA in a design review process.

6. Can the County Engineering Office assist us in formulating a strategy how to best approach funding & sequencing a plan to re-asphalt our roadways following sewer installation? Are there any County, State, or Federal programs we could apply for to assist in fixing our roadways & which might best sync with the sewers' construction?

Answer: There is no such program at the Federal level. Since the roads are in the State's maintenance system you could apply for legislative CTF funding or the HOA could request a County, Chapter 96 project. Either option would follow on the heels of the sewer project's paving but be separate from a contractual standpoint.

7. Have other communities obtained a single company to perform septic closure & final sewer connection? Can the County offer us any information on what companies/communities have performed/employed this function/practice - to guide our engagement of prospective firms?

Answer: We are not aware of any community wide efforts. However, due to special circumstance the County had to recently perform this function in the Love Creek Woods subdivision. Therefore, we have a set of bid documents we could make available to Wolfe Runne if the HOA wanted to take on this task.

**Questions and Answers for/from Sussex County Engineer
Regarding Wolfe Runne Sewers and Roads
October 10, 2019**

(A follow-up Question):

Can the HOA keep its community pool's bath house on a stand-alone septic system or does the County Code mandate transitioning, along with all homes, to sewers?

And, if the bath house were to remain on septic, would the HOA's taxes increase to reflect the loan repayment each homeowner will be paying?

The pool is seasonal (Memorial Day to End of September), only has 2 showers, 3 sinks, 4 toilets, and its drains do not go to the septic/nor will they go to the sewer.

Answer: Thank you for the follow-up question regarding the pool and bath house. We have numerous such facilities throughout the sewer district. County Code, § 110-5, Connection to public sewer required, mandates connection of all structures residential & commercial with sanitary facilities. In other words, the bath house and potentially pool filter backwash will be connected and assessed. However, the pool can remain on it's separate drains w/o assessment. We prefer that solution since pool drainage in the sewer system, so allowed and assessed if connected, has a potential to cause problems.

**Questions & Answers for/from Sussex County Engineer
regarding Wolfe Runne Sewers and Roads
December 16, 2017
(Prior to Community approval)**

- 1. Is there any plan in the County to force Wolfe Runne to integrate into the County sewer system?**

Answer: No – the County has no plans to compel WR to integrate into the sewers but WR is within the current County sewer district & could integrate into the system if a request to do were made.

- 2. How does Wolfe Runne begin the process to obtain detailed cost information to evaluate transitioning to County sewers?**

Answer: WR must request to be integrated into the County sewer system to begin the detailed planning/costing process. Once this request is made, WR is committed to transitioning to sewers and cannot back out. A letter from the WR Board is sufficient to formally begin the process.

- 3. Will the County begin initial design & costing work without Wolfe Runne (WR) being committed to transitioning to sewers?**

Answer: No - See #2 above.

- 4. What percentage of the WR Lot Owners does the County recognize as the number required to commit Wolfe Runne to the transition to sewers?**

Answer: If WR were not in the sewer district, the County would require 55% of the Lot Owners to vote for sewers. Given WR is in the district, the County would accept a letter from the WRHOA Board stating, 'a vote had been held, IAW the WRHOA By-Laws, and that vote determined WR wants to transition to sewers.

- 5. Does the County conduct a meeting to formally pose the question of transitioning to sewers & then conduct a vote to determine the required percentage of Lot Owners has been achieved?**

Answer: The County will support a WRHOA member meeting to answer questions but at this juncture, the County would expect WRHOA to handle the voting / decision on transitioning.

6. If the County approves Wolfe Runne’s integration into the sewer system – must all Lot Owners go to sewers & close all septic systems?

Answer: Yes. By regulation, all residents are required to transition to sewers & close their septic systems.

7. If approved by the Wolfe Runne Community at our November 2018 meeting, when would the sewers be available for home owner connection and use?

Answer: This is normally a 3-year timeline but can be accelerated when there are dire consequences but expediting installation carries additional costs to Lot Owners.

8. How soon after completion of the sewer system’s installation must this conversion happen?

Answer: Within 6 to 12 months of the sewer system being declared operational, all residents are expected to have closed their septic systems & be on sewers.

9. What is the current County “sewer connection charge” that each WR Lot Owner would pay?

Answer: \$6,360 – charged to all Lot Owners, regardless of a lot being developed or undeveloped.

10. When would a WR Lot Owner have to pay this “sewer connection charge” (SCC)?

Answer: This depends on how sewer construction is financed – State, Federal, or County loan?

If a State or Federal loan is obtained by the County for the construction costs, the \$6,360 charge can be rolled into the loan/funding request & the Lot Owners' charge is amortized over the life of the State or Federal loan, through the Lot Owner's Annual Sewer Assessment.

If the County has to fund the construction costs, the \$6360 charge is payable, in lump sum, when the system is declared operational. The WRHOA, may be able to negotiate a "payment plan" for WR Lot Owners, but it would a single plan for the development, not individual plans for each Lot Owner.

Note: The State & Federal governments consider loan applications twice a year (January & August). WR & the County could make the August submission timeline, but not the January.

11. Are all lots (developed & undeveloped) subject to the "sewer connection charge" on that timeline?

Answer: Yes.

12. What is the Annual County Assessment Charge each WR Lot Owner would pay?

Answer: It is currently \$540/year & is a fixed amount for the life of the construction loan obtained. WR's assessment can't be estimated until the system is designed, but our charge would not be less than \$540/year.

Note: Federal guidelines state, '...the total annual charges to a home owner should not be more than 1.5% of the median household income (MHI), as determined by a census'. The 2010 census determined Sussex's County's MHI to be ~\$56,000 & 1.5% of that is \$840 – Current County Annual Assessment & Sewer Usage Charge is \$826.

This amount cannot be determined until the funding source is determined & based on the funding source, the timing of 'loan closure' different. The State locks in the loan at the beginning of the process, whereas the Federal side locks it in at the end.

WRHOA could state in its letter to the County, ‘...WR only desires to transition to sewers if the total annual expense to a resident is xxx-dollars.’ A statement to this effect limits WRHOA members from committing to an exorbitant annual expense & may present an ‘out’ if the design costs prove to be high.

13. What is the Annual Sewer Usage Charge each WR Lot Owner would pay?

Answer: Currently is \$286/year – it is reviewed & adjusted each year during the budget cycle.

14. Is the Usage Charge based on running foot frontage or on number of bathrooms per home?

Answer: The County no longer uses ‘foot frontage’ to determine the Usage Charge. The County now uses the Equivalent Dwelling Unit concept to determine the Usage Charge & currently it is the same amount for every home in Sussex County, regardless of size or number of bedrooms or baths. This may change in the future and be defined as ‘...an EDU is a 3 bedroom home, with 2.5 bathrooms...’ so homes with more than those numbers of rooms/baths would pay a higher rate.

15. If running foot charge, what is the rate, how is it measured, & is there a differential for those on a corner lot?

Answer: Not Applicable Anymore.

16. If there is a foot frontage charge, what would the charge be for all the common ground road frontage areas of the development, if any?

Answer: Not Applicable Anymore.

17. The common foot frontage for the community pool & tennis courts & storage barn would be calculated in what manner?

Answer: Today, the Pool House is treated as an EDU.

18. How & when are the Annual Assessment & Usage Charge billed to the Lot Owner?

Answer: The Annual Assessment is billed annually with your tax bill. The Usage Charge is billed quarterly.

19. Do Annual Assessment & Usage Charges apply to “undeveloped lots” or only “developed lots”?

Answer: Undeveloped Lots are charged the Annual Assessment Charge, as this is capital funding required to repay the construction loan. Undeveloped Lots pay a ‘reduced Usage Charge’ as this amount ensures the sewer system will be available for future use.

20. Are there any plans or options available to spread upfront costs by each lot owner over a period of time & at what additional cost if available?

Answer: Yes - See answer to Question #10.

21. Are final house-to-sewer connection & shutdown of a septic system a Lot Owner’s responsibility & a separate cost from those discussed above?

Answer: Yes – Estimated costs are \$1,500 to \$2,000 & each Lot Owner must pay a \$100 Permit Fee.

22. What are the requirements for closing or shutting-down a septic system?

Answer: The septic tank must be filled-in and the fill compacted to ensure the tank cannot collapse or create an empty chamber or it can be removed & the hole filled. The drain fields are not altered or removed.

The Lot Owner must ensure the plumber obtains a State ‘Abandonment Permit’ when the septic is closed – this permit informs the State as to how the septic was closed & is important to ensure there are no issues when the property transfers.

23. If a pump house is required for Wolfe Runne, what would be the approximate costs & is this calculated into the assessment or is this a separate up-front charge to WR Lot Owners?

Answer: WR will require a pump system (possibly two of them). A rough cost estimate for a WR sewer system with 2 pumps is \$2 million dollars.

24. If a pump house is required, does this require transfer of common area to the County or merely granting an easement to the area required?

Answer: The pumps are actually buried in the ground but a generator set & electrical control panel is required. An easement would facilitate their installation.

25. Does the Wolfe Runne Architectural Review Committee have input on the exterior design & location of the pump house?

Answer: The County will work with the HOA on placement, design, & masking of the pump system. Using the HOA shed may be a feasible solution. The generators run, for a short period of time, once a month to validate system status & that is the only noise associated with the pumps. The County has a variety of plans & options to be considered.

26. If a sewers are approved, but not yet available for use, how does a Lot Owner that builds a home avoid the additional expense of installing a septic system, which will have to be shut-down within a few years?

Answer: Once sewers are approved, the County issues a 'Near Term Service Letter' with a 5-year life. This letter enables Lot Owners who sell their home from having to upgrade septic systems to current standards, so long as the system is serviceable. It also allows re-construction of septic systems to be to older standards – which cost less. An undeveloped lot that is developed with an NTSL in-place qualifies for rebates that will reduce the Lot Owner's septic system costs but it may not cover the total cost. The rebate is pro-rated over the construction period's lifespan but won't exceed 5 years.

27. Are repairs & repaving of WR roadways affected by sewer installation covered within this overall project & not at an additional expense to WR Lot Owners?

Answer: Any road 'disturbed by sewer construction will be repaved' but this does not mean the full width or breadth of a roadway will be repaved. To reduce overall costs, the construction attempts to limit disturbance to the roads.

28. If road repair is part of the County's sewer installation program, how does the County synchronize repaving synchronize with house to sewer connections?

Answer: The County will complete sewer system installation before it repaves any roads, so WR could have rocked road segments for a period of time.

29. If road repaving is not covered, are there any funding options from any source to offset this expense?

Answer: WR has State roads so the first option is to pursue Community Transportation Funds through our legislators to synchronize State & County repaving operations. A second option is to request the County 'loan WR Lot Owners funding' under Chapter-96 to repave the entire community & Lot Owners will repay the loan overtime as an addition to their tax bill.

30. With the current new development coming to the area near the high school, is it safe to say that if WR do not act now to transition to sewers, there may not be capacity for WR in the near future?

Answer: Sewer system capacity is not an issue. The County has capacity to accept WR & plans with a 5 year horizon to ensure it has excess capacity to accept additional development.

31. What are the County Sewer System's projections for capacity in 10 years, 20 years, and 30 years?

Answer: See Question-30's answer.

32. If a WR homeowner's current septic system utilizes a sump pump because of property grade, will a new pumping system be required for the house to sewer connection and what would be the design and cost of this new system?

Answer: The Lot Owner would probably have to retain their pumping system when they transition to sewers.