FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION SEPTIC TO SEWER PROJECT

Why the project?

Many studies throughout Florida have shown that septic tanks are the primary contributor to the pollution of our Lakes, which led the Lake Placid area to be included in the Lake Okeechobee Basin Management Action Plan (BMAP) by the State of Florida.

FDEP designated the lake "Lake Placid" as an impaired water body due to nutrient loading.

SWFWMD and Highlands County funded and HDR Engineering completed a water quality study for Lake June. This study showed that onsite sewage treatment and disposal system (OSTDS)- septic tanks- were the largest contributor of Nitrogen and Phosphorus to Lake June.

In the past 8 months we have had algae blooms (some toxic) in numerous lakes around the area including Lake Placid and Lake June. These can be found on the FDEP website for Algal blooms.

The Florida Legislature passed HB1379 The Clean Waterways Act that, among other things:
Develop a remediation plan to meet the nutrient reduction goals of the BMAP.
For developments, built or unbuilt, with over 50 homes and more than 1 OSTDS per acre; consider the feasibility of providing sanitary sewer services- within a 10-year planning horizon.
New OSTDS systems must be Nutrient-reducing OSTDS

The Lake Okeechobee BMAP, Lake June Report, HB1379 Environmental Protection and other information can be found under the Save our Lakes tab on the Town website. Lakeplacidfl.net

How is the Town addressing the problem?

To address these issues the Town of Lake Placid applied for and was awarded a $40 million grant to do two things, (1) build a new 1,000,000 Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant and (2) to install wastewater collection lines to connect existing septic systems to the new advanced WWTP. The advanced treatment plant will remove nutrients otherwise seeping into our groundwater and lakes.

What is the difference between septic tank discharges vs sewer plant discharges?

Septic tanks typically discharge approximately 4 times the amount of Phosphorus than the Town's existing sewer plant. As part of the grant, we will be constructing a new Advanced Wastewater Treatment Plant that will remove approximately 10 times more Phosphorus than an existing septic tank.

How were the areas included in the plan?

The initial design areas approved by the Town Council for design of a septic to sewer conversion began by following the flow of water south to north. Starting with Lake Placid which flows into Lake June and

then the South, East and part of the North side of Lake June. The areas currently under design were selected to achieve the greatest impact on the problem for the lowest cost, which are the properties closest to the Lakes.

Why low pressure and not gravity?

Most Lakefront houses are below street level requiring the effluent from the home to be pumped to the street to enter the collection system. High water tables in areas like Placid Lakes also make the installation of a gravity system impractical. Other systems such as vacuum and step systems were considered and ruled out, making a low-pressure system the most practical from a design and cost perspective.

We approached four (4) engineering firms to provide designs to best meet our particular needs, all four came to the conclusion that the best solution for most of our needs was a low-pressure system.

How much is it going to cost a household?

This is a complex question that relies on the cost of construction, the availability of additional money (grants) and the scope of the project. This question won't be answered until the first quarter of 2024 at the earliest. The Town is applying for additional grants to pay for the cost of installation.

How much is my monthly sewer bill going to be?

The amount the sewer adds to your water bill is dependent on your water usage, if no water is used then the current base rate and usage per 1000 gallons will apply.

What happens when my pump quits working, who do I call?

If the level of your tank gets too high, there will be a flashing red light on the panel. The tank still has approximately 40 gallons of capacity left so there is time for a response. The Town will be stocking replacement pumps, panels and parts.
No final decisions have been made, some Utilities take care of the maintenance, some leave it up to the homeowner. The Town Council will make the decision considering the best interests of all their constituents when all the information is available.

How much does a typical grinder station cost (complete)?

The average cost to install a complete grinder system, including electrical and to abandon the septic tank is estimated at $10,000. It is unknown at this time what if any the cost to the property owner will be. The Town is applying for a DEP grant and working on a Legislative appropriation to cover the cost of installation.

Typically, how long will a grinder pump last?

The average replacement age is 8 -10 years for the pump across all of the systems E-one has sold.

How much does it cost to replace a grinder pump?

The replacement cost today is approximately $3000.

What size generator does it take to run a grinder pump?
A portable 5000-watt generator, the same that would be used to power other home appliances will power the grinder pump. The current cost is less than $800 including a 240-volt extension cord. The control panel has a connection (plug in) for a generator. If you have a whole house generator, then it will run as normal.

How much is an advanced septic tank system?

Unknown exactly since every location is different. It appears that each system will need to be engineered and will probably cost about $20,000.

What happens when the power goes out?

The system will hold approximately 100 gallons, so for short outages flushing toilets is not an issue. Newer toilets use 1.6 gallons per flush; the washer, dishwasher and water heater will not work so water usage is substantially lower.

What happens after a hurricane?

Depending on the severity of the storm, if the power goes out the system does not function as intended. The duration of the outage will determine the needed response.
For Homeowners with a Whole house generator the system will work as normal.
For customers without a whole house generator: with careful water use the system will need to run for about 10 minutes every couple of days for the pump to run and empty the tank. The Town is considering options and solutions for this issue.

When will we have answers?

We're hard pressed to have all the answers without knowing all the questions. We are using best engineering judgement, solicitating best practices and writing as detailed specifications as practicable as to what we need in an effort to get accurate bids from potential contractors.

Design has been underway since October 2022 and is expected to be complete in October of 2023. Once designs are complete, they will go out to bid to determine actual costs. Hopefully in early 2024 we will know the total cost, and this will allow the Council to decide what projects can get constructed with the available funds and what projects may get left out of this initial phase.

The current design is for the "backbone" of the system. The Town is applying for additional grants to fund the installation and connection from the home to the central system. The Town has the ability, if necessary, to further reduce the scope of the "backbone" to allow for some level of funding for property connections.

These decisions will be made once we have bids and actual costs for the WWTP and each of the areas under design, until then actual costs to a property owner are speculation.

The Town will make the best decision as to how to proceed with the Utilities and all its customers' best interests in mind.