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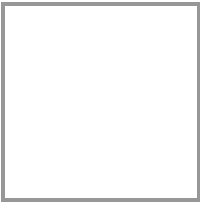
UTAH

Jordanelle growth distressing Heber

By Deseret News | Sep 25, 2001, 8:19am MDT

Dave Anderton business writer

GRID VIEW



JORDANELLE, Wasatch County — Millions of gallons of sewage will ultimately flow south to Heber Valley as thousands of homes, condominiums and hotels are eventually built here.

But deciding where to treat all that wastewater has created a political firestorm in this otherwise sleepy valley and has left government officials deadlocked over a solution.

The controversy centers on the county's only wastewater treatment facility, capable of treating the effluent of nearly 4,400 connections.

Yet Scott Wright, manager of the Heber Valley Special District, the agency overseeing wastewater treatment, said the current system is already operating above capacity. It currently treats the wastewater of Heber Valley's 4,600 homes — most of the connections in Midway and Heber cities.

And although Heber's current facility is capable of expanding to nearly double its present capacity — the district recently purchased 45 acres of property for expansion — most future connections were anticipated to come from growth within Heber and Midway cities, not pricey second homes in Jordanelle.

"The kind of connections that they are expecting to build out in Jordanelle, there is no way we can handle it," Wright warns.

If Wright is correct, big trouble looms based on Jordanelle's master plan, which calls for nearly 13,000 units to overlook the reservoir in the next 20 years.

According to some engineering estimates, more than 2,700 Jordanelle connections could be tied to Heber's facility by 2005. In addition, a main trunk line tying Jordanelle to Heber Valley has the capacity of handling the reservoir's west-side growth, where more than 6,000 units are planned.

But Wright contends Heber Valley Special District never agreed to handle the wastewater of thousands of Jordanelle units.

"According to what was given to us (in 1998), there were only going to be 1,640 connections coming out of Jordanelle in the next 20 years," Wright said.

Building a new treatment plant is easier said than done and faces several hurdles.

Heber's current facility was designed as an aerated, land-application treatment process — where semitreated wastewater is sprinkled over nearly 400 acres of alfalfa fields, averting a discharge into the sensitive Provo River and Deer Creek Reservoir.

"That basically removes the phosphorous and nitrogen because they are taken up in the crops," said Jay Pitkin, assistant director of the state's Division of Water Quality.

"They are very sensitive about phosphates in the Provo River drainage," Wright said.

In fact, regional plans stemming from the Federal Clean Water Act prohibit any surface discharges into the Provo drainage, Pitkin said.

Building a new mechanical system in Wasatch County would require not only the state's approval but also an alteration of the current regional plan, according to Don Ostler, director of the Division of Water Quality.

A mechanical treatment system in Heber Valley would also need to be outfitted with technology to remove phosphorous, which acts like a fertilizer causing aquatic plants and algae to grow "like crazy," Ostler said.

"When you grow all of those plants, it uses up all the oxygen so the fish can't survive. They become diseased and stressed," he said. "Organic matter also creates taste and odor problems in drinking water downstream."

Most agree a mechanical system capable of removing phosphorous would be extremely expensive to operate — four to five times the cost of Heber's land-application system, Wright said.

On top of higher operational costs, approximately \$20 million is needed to build such a mechanical system.

It all adds up to potentially higher sewer fees because of Jordanelle's growth for Heber Valley residents . Hardly a winning political proposition.

"We've paid for the (existing) plant. Now, (Wasatch County) wants the excess capacity, and they haven't paid for any of it. That really is the only issue," said Heber City Mayor Lynn Adams, who sits on the seven-member administrative control board overseeing the facility.

"Midway and Heber cities have bought the present capacity, and we should be able to use it for our future growth needs first and not the county's needs because they haven't paid a cent on it," Adams said.

Even with current impact fees fixed at roughly \$3,200 per hookup, Jordanelle's first 3,000 units would generate less than half of the \$20 million needed to construct a new plant.

Dan Matthews, manager of the Jordanelle Special Service District, said he doesn't understand what all the bickering is about.

"The original plan back in '93 was to build a treatment plant up here (in Jordanelle)," Matthews said. "At that time the political powers said, 'No, we would rather have it in Heber. It will help the Heber Valley plant.' Three or four years pass by the time it is readdressed and now they are saying, 'We don't want the sewer.' "

Wasatch County commissioners adopted a resolution earlier this month authorizing Matthews to begin the process of amending the law. A pilot study of the feasibility of building a new mechanical system will also be launched.

A proposed reuse system built in Jordanelle — where wastewater is treated and then used to water golf courses — could still generate too much wastewater and would cause a need to discharge into the reservoir, Pitkin said.

"There are a lot of hoops that have to be negotiated to be ever able to discharge, and then you are going to have to provide a very high level of treatment. Removing phosphorous from wastewater is not cheap," Pitkin said.

For Wright, who previously served eight years as Heber City's mayor, the political fallout of building a mechanical system could be enormous.

"How do we build a (new) \$20 million facility? We are still paying the bonds on this one. We are not going to be able to go to the people of Heber and Midway and say, 'We need to build a \$20 million facility,' " Wright said.

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