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Posted on Sun, Jul. 14, 2002

Duluth News Tribune

Construction of sewer line extension begins with groundbreaking

BY CHRIS HAVENS
NEWS TRIBUNE STAFF WRITER

A ceremonial groundbreaking Saturday marked the start of construction on a 13.9-mile sewer line extension that will run along the North Shore from the Lester River to the Knife River.

Real dirt is expected to turn by the end of the month, and leaves North Shore residents with mixed feelings.

Many folks are happy to hook up to a sewer line because it will help preserve Lake Superior. Pollution control officials have estimated that as much as 80 percent of the North Shore's private septic systems are failing.

Others are concerned that development will follow in the path of the extension, a notion that bothers people who moved for scenic views and fewer buildings.

Some are worried that connection costs will be too expensive. Small-business owners and those on a fixed income might encounter problems paying for the assessment and monthly fees.

But the \$13 million line is coming, and those who live near it -- between the Two Harbors Expressway and the lakeshore -- are obligated by state law to hook up to it.

Margaret Hamilton has lived in a house just inside Duluth city limits since 1964. She's ready for a new sewer line.

"We need a sewer out here," she said. "We need to do something because the lake is being polluted by failing (septic) systems."

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Although a sewer line will help solve some problems, Hamilton and others are concerned that too much development might follow.

She said residents are working to make sure zoning laws are appropriate for the area.

"We need to be very careful about development," Hamilton said.

The line will serve between 420 and 450 properties, said Mary Ann Sironen, a member of the Duluth-North Shore Sanitary District Board.

The project will cost about \$13 million. A \$6 million federal grant has been secured, as well as another \$500,000 from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

The rest of the cost will be assessed to the properties through taxes and monthly fees.

Sironen said the exact costs are still being tinkered with, but estimates suggest folks would be paying between \$1,000 and \$1,200 yearly. "As systems go, it is expensive," she said.

Phil and Janet Meany have a self-contained, closed-loop system that treats wastewater on their property and does a fine job, they say.

Phil said there could have been more research to find a different alternative than the sewer line.

"The system will work, but the question is, was it the best system?" Phil Meany said.

With a sewer line, though, comes higher property values.

"There's no question that it will increase property values, and it will spur on development," said Ken Truscott, broker/owner of Prudential Truscott Realtors of Duluth. He sells property from Duluth to the Canadian border.

Just having the ability to hook up to a sewer line increases property value, regardless of whether there's a building, Truscott said.

The North Shore is inundated with clay, and it's difficult to have a septic system for many properties, Truscott said. Systems can cost from \$10,000 to \$20,000 to install. "If you're looking at paying

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\$1,000 per year, it's not so bad," he said. "Unless you don't have the

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