

Hopatcong sees rise in price of sewers

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Hopatcong residents who are getting sewers will be asked to dish out another \$9 million, Mayor Richard Hodson said yesterday.

The borough council tonight will introduce an ordinance authorizing the additional funds for the \$46.5 million project.

"The bids from the very beginning far exceeded what had been projected," Hodson said.

The estimated price of the project jumped by about 20 percent as excavators hit more bedrock than the borough anticipated, Hodson said.

An engineering study by the company that is now Hatch Mott MacDonald miscalculated the amount and depth of rock, which eventually interfered with sewer installation, said Councilman John Armeno.

"I guess when you have any project things aren't going to go as well as you want them to," Armeno said. "We're a little miffed ourselves."

No one from the engineering firm, which is overseeing the project, could be reached for comment.

In addition, most contracts

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ended up being more expensive than the borough had anticipated when it is bonded, Hodson said.

Another complication came as crews began digging last year, and roads essentially caved in, enlarging the surface area to cover the trenches, he said.

"The trenches got bigger. And we had to pay for it. Overall, the project encountered more rock. Definitely more blasting," he said.

The project has taken longer than expected, leaving the borough without income from homeowners to pay the Musconetcong Sewer Authority's treatment plant for a 500,000-gallon tank, Hodson said.

"We anticipated by now not to be at 266 customers, but to be at 800 customers. That's because original rates of progress decreased dramatically," he said, explaining another reason for the price increase.

Construction crews began excavating the rocky, hilly streets of Hopatcong in May 2003 to install sewer lines for roughly 2,900 homes and businesses. Work in the Hopatcong Heights, Hills South, Point Pleasant, and town center areas is nearly complete and parts of the second phase of the project are under way, Hodson said.

Of the original cost of the project, residents would be responsible for about \$32.5 million that the town bonded for, and state and federal grants would cover about \$14 million, Hodson said.

But residents who are getting sewers eventually will be responsible for the additional \$9 million, which the council will vote on in November. Hodson was unsure how much more an individual property owner will have to pay, saying the amount will be determined by the interest rate and type of bond the council chooses.

The annual sewer bill is set at \$875 for the next 20 years, in addition to a \$1,500 to \$3,500 connection cost.