

## **Southern Kent Island Septic System Relief Plan - FAQ's**

### 1. What are the estimated costs and how will the project be paid for?

*The total project cost is approximately \$54 million. This includes \$37.4 million for the sewer system construction and \$16.3 million for connection (treatment) fees. The project cost is about \$10 million less than a conventional public sewer system by using the Septic Tank Effluent Pumping System (STEP).*

*This Financial Model is based on parameters that will be adjusted as the project progresses. The County is committed to keeping the monthly charge at or below the \$100 per month target charge for existing homeowners.*

*The financial parameters include:*

- *New Buildable Vacant Lots will be 560*
- *An Economic Benefit Premium value of \$25,600 per buildable vacant lot*
- *A secured Bay Restoration Fund Grant of \$11.8 million.*
- *A low interest loan from the State for the cost of the project not satisfied by grant funds (1.5% over 20 years)*

### 2. The information talks about a target \$100 monthly cost to homeowners. Will that change between now and when systems get installed?

*The County is committed to keeping the charge targeted at \$100/month for existing residents under this proposal. The design effort underway now for phase 1 of the project will be used to further ensure the cost can meet this objective.*

### 3. Is there any guarantee that the price won't go up within a year or two after homes are hooked up?

*Once the benefit assessment is levied for the new infrastructure needed for public sewer service, it is fixed throughout the payment term of the project. In this case, we are basing the repayment on a 20-year period.*

*Of the \$100 per month target charge, \$70 is for the benefit assessment. This portion of the charge is fixed for the entire 20-year term.*

*The remaining \$30 is for Operations and Maintenance (O&M) and State Bay Restoration Fund (BRF) fee. The O&M portion is \$25 which is the ongoing cost to run the system. O&M charges generally increase by a small percentage each year. O&M sewer rates for our existing public sewer customers were increased*

by 2.5% last year. The remaining \$5 portion is your State Bay Restoration Fund fee. This is the same fee you currently pay on your annual property tax bill. When public sewer is provided to residents on septic systems, State law requires this fee to be transferred to your utility bill (and removed from your property tax bill).

4. I'm on a fixed income. I can't afford \$100 more a month. Is there any relief from this monthly cost?

As noted under question #3, of the \$100 'target charge', \$70 is to repay the benefit assessment (the cost to construct the sewer system) and the \$30 is to operate and maintain (O&M) the system (plus BRF fees) once constructed.

In regards to the benefit assessment portion of the 'target charge', provided your income level meets the eligibility criteria, there will be some 'revolving loan' funds that could be used to pay all, or a portion of, a homeowners benefit assessment. The County will pursue these additional grant funds for qualified residents.

In regards to the \$25 O&M portion of the bill, the County has an existing policy within the Sanitary District that reduces this fee by more than half provided the property owner's adjusted gross income is \$25,000 or less.

5. What if I can manage to pay for the installation up front instead of monthly for 20 years? How much would that be?

Under the current proposal, **which includes a State Grant, a State Loan and 560 vacant lots served**, the up-front fee would be about \$14,500 for existing homes. You would still have to pay the \$30 per month O&M and BRF fee.

6. Why not serve all of the homes on Southern Kent Island in order to make the "unit cost" lower to all residents?

There are additional 690 homes which lie outside of the nine communities in this project. These homes are scattered throughout the area.

If we were to connect the other 690 homes south of Matapeake Estates along MD 8 not currently shown to be served, the monthly 'target charge' would increase from \$100 to approximately \$150. This assumes the remaining other project funding parameters remain constant as shown under question #1.

The overall cost per connection is much higher due to the necessity of needing a great deal of additional pipe to reach them all.

7. What about the 1 million gallons of sewage spills Queen Anne's County Public Sewer lines have caused on the Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) report?

*MDE began requiring the mandatory reporting of Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSO) and Bypasses in 2005. A Bypass typically occurs during or subsequent to a major storm event.*

*Since the databases' initiation, the bulk of the overflows on the MDE database within Queen Anne's County are for the incorporated Town of Centreville (95%). Of these Centreville flows, 75% were in fact 'bypasses' at the Centreville treatment plant. In these cases, some treatment was provided but due to excessive stormwater inflow a component of the treatment process was bypassed.*

*The County's Sanitary District has experienced 87,000 gallons of spills since 2005, predominately from corroded sewage force mains. The County has just issued a contract of \$2Million to upgrade our existing force mains.*

8. If I am forced to merge my home lot with my adjacent vacant lot, will my taxes increase?

*Your taxes will most likely not increase as a result of the merger itself.*

*To the extent that the value of your property increases as a result of access to public sewer, your property taxes will reflect the increased value.*

9. What if I have two adjacent lots that must be merged and each lot has a different mortgage on it?

*It is anticipated that this issue will arise in very few situations.*

*If it does, however, the property owner will be required to work with the lenders involved to come up with an acceptable solution.*

*If a refinance of the properties is required, it should be greatly facilitated by the increase in fair market value attributable to the resulting lot's access to public sewer.*

10. Is there any groundwater testing data available which documents the health threat?

*Groundwater testing data is available for many properties in the county, (particularly on Kent Island) as part of routine septic system permitting and*

*inspection procedures and from records of groundwater measurements at various sites.*

*The Queen Anne's County Health Department has documented septic system issues for many years and has compiled data on failing septic systems known to be discharging septic effluent into groundwater. Fecal coliform bacteria and other pathogens from the human intestinal track present in this effluent is a well defined health risk. Well water testing analyzes for fecal coliform bacteria as a standard procedure. Such testing is not necessary for septic system discharges because fecal coliform and other pathogens are present in all septic system discharge. Even BAT septic systems have levels of fecal coliform and pathogens in their discharges. MDE, the Health Department as well as BAT system manufacturers have confirmed this with testing.*

*Therefore, a serious public health and water quality problem is created from septic systems that do not function properly (primarily due to poor soils and a high groundwater table) and discharge bacteria to subsurface groundwater, often rising to the land surface where it is a risk to humans.*

*The Queen Anne's County Health Department has reported for many years that there are areas of such health risk, particularly in Southern Kent Island. The Maryland Department of the Environment (MDE) concurred with this assessment in writing in 2010. MDE also stated, "given that there are fifteen hundred improved properties, there is a current, existing issue that cannot be ignored by the public health and environmental agencies".*

11. The Wye River Keeper report indicates that the water on Southern Kent Island (SKI) is the cleanest in the County?

*The 2012 report indicated the entire Eastern Bay, of which the SKI drainage area is but a small part, was graded a 'B'. The report notes; "This was the first year that Eastern Bay was included in our testing. Its better grades are not surprising in that Eastern Bay is a well-flushed body of water and is open to the tidal flows of the Chesapeake." Also the Riverkeeper does not sample for fecal coliform and other pathogens which are the cause of the health risk concern.*

12. What if I have only one lot and my Building Restriction Line setbacks don't provide me enough room to build a house?

*The current zoning will allow the construction of a home on a non-conforming lot although Board of Appeals variances may be necessary.*

13. Why are the lot and home counts different from the Johnson Mirmiran & Thompson (JMT) - SKI report?

*The basis of the lot counts were completed differently than in the JMT/SKI report as follows: 1. The current lot counts are based on the proposed merger bill #13-24. For example, when counting improved properties in the SKI report, if a home owner owned three contiguous 10,000 sf lots in an NC 20 zoning district and the home was situated on two of the three lots, this was counted as one improved and one vacant. Under the current proposed plan this results in one improved and zero vacant. 2. The 2006 CWSP plan maps were used as the proposed sewer service area since these are the currently approved public policy documents. They are extremely close to the service areas used in the JMT/SKI report but they are not identical. These maps are posted on the SKI webpage. 3. The most current and updated County GIS data was used for this analysis.*

14. If a decision is made to run sewer to my home, will I still have to put in a holding tank until I am connected to the public system?

*All State and Local agencies are working together to solve the failing septic system problems in your community. If MDE and the local Health Officer are assured the County's construction of a public sewer system to service your community is imminent, all efforts will be made to avoid the need for holding tanks.*

15. What if I REFUSE to give the County an easement to install a Septic Tank Effluent Pump (STEP) assembly tank on my property?

*The County cannot force you to grant an easement. If the easement is refused, no work would be undertaken by the County on your property.*

*However, once public sewer is available, you are required by law to connect and, in addition; the Health Department holds the authority to order the connection to the system. Also the property would still be subject to a full benefit assessment and required to pay the same proportionate share of the project costs as those homes that agreed to grant an easement.*

*If not installed by the County as part of the project, the cost of installation of the STEP tank at a later date will be the sole obligation of the property owner with no financial assistance from the County. In addition, your individual portion of the secured \$11.8 million State BRF grant may be jeopardized.*

16. How do I merge my lots and how much will it cost me?

*In the majority of cases, the County will assist with this process and make it a component of the overall project cost (and include this within the \$100 target charge to existing residents).*

*A Declaration of Administrative Subdivision is a 'fill in the blank' legal document that references back to the original subdivision plat recorded in Land Records. This document was created as an easier way to complete the administrative subdivision process without requiring the assistance of a surveyor.*

17. What if there is a leak at the tank and it's only 15' from well? What if tank or piping leaks and well is contaminated? Who pays for new well if needed? Is there experience with septic intrusion from STEP tanks in other communities?

*State regulations require a 10-foot separation between sewer components and wells to limit any potential for contamination. The stratum that is used by the well to provide a home with drinking water is separated from the surface stratum in which a leak would occur (and which the existing septic systems currently discharge into) by a thick layer of clay.*

*In order for the waste from a leaking tank or an adjacent septic system to enter the drinking water stratum, there would have to be a crack or other defect in the well casing.*

*As such the well's 'failing' would not be due to any leak in and of itself, the well would have been defective to begin with to allow the contamination. Therefore if the well is defective, the homeowner would have to pay for its repair or replacement.*