Pickens water plant work begins soon

$4.3 million project to improve treatment process, official says

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After years of planning and discussions, work to rehabilitate the city of Pickens' water treatment plant is expected to start this fall.

Pickens City Council has awarded a $2.5 million contract to J.L. Construction, based in Greenville, for the water treatment plant rehabilitation.

City Administrator Katherine Brackett said the total project cost will be up to about $4.3 million, including engineering, contingency funds and legal fees.

Brackett said work on the water plant is expected to start around Nov. 1 and will take about one year.

Pickens City Council has been discussing needed improvements at the water plant, which was built in the 1950s, for more than five years.

Brackett said the plant meets water quality requirements, but it has a needs improvement status in some areas from the state Department of Health and Environmental Control.

"This project is targeted exactly at those areas," she said.

Equipment is starting to fall apart and the upgrades will improve reliability and water quality for customers, Brackett said.

Pickens Mayor David Owens said the plant hasn't had upgrades in many years.

"I think the last major upgrade was probably in the 70s, and the plant was built in the 50s," Owens said. "With a plant as old as it is, we need some upgrades."

Brackett said this is a scaled-down but still major overhaul of the aging water plant.

She said the city had originally sought almost $16 million from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Rural Development agency in the state to repair the water plant but turned down a $9.8 million loan and a $6 million grant from Rural Development.

Brackett said city officials thought it would be better to do improvements in stages rather than have to issue bonds for the loan amount because water bills would have increased significantly.

Rates still have increased for the plant upgrade but not as much, she said.

The project cost was reduced to about $6.8 million and then again to the now about $4.3 million, Brackett said.

The work calls for improvements to the sedimentation basin, construction of a new rapid-mix structure, rehabilitation to the flocculation basin and improvements to filters, all of which are part of the treatment process to remove particles from the water, Brackett said.

Original plans had called to replace interior piping for the plant, she said, and that has been delayed for future phases of the renovation to reduce the cost.

City Council has approved an ordinance providing for the issuance and sale of bonds not to exceed $4.3 million to fund the water treatment plant project.

Brackett said the bonds will be paid back by an increase in water and sewer rates that City Council previously approved.

She said the water plant serves about 4,400 water customers, both inside and outside city limits, and also provides wholesale water to another water company.

"It's definitely important," Brackett said.