Seneca Daily Journal

Seneca troubleshoots sewer line project

BY ANDREW MOORE
THE JOURNAL

SENECA — Seneca Utilities Director Bob Faires confirmed Friday that the third and final division of the massive Duke Sewer Line project has been bid on, ranging from $4.5 million to slightly more than $1 million. The bidding on the contract opened Tuesday afternoon.

"We got eight bids, and actually, just one was really out of range at $4.5 million," Faires said. "The rest of them, at least six of the eight were pretty darn close to each other."

The lowest bid, submitted by Tugaloo Pipeline out of Westminster, still surpasses the $1 million budget faced by Seneca and Duke Energy.

The final phase of the project will complete an undertaking several years in the making. In 2007, Seneca Light and Water opened up the bidding for the first division of the nine-mile sewer line when Duke Energy offered to fund the project so Seneca could treat Duke's sewer water, which had previously been treated on site.

Under the agreement, Seneca Light and Water will own the line and will have to pay for its maintenance and operation.

But the third phase, stretching from Newry to just beyond the US. 123 and S.C. 130 intersection in Seneca, has hit a snag.

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While the lowest bid of $1,060,000 just exceeds the $1 million budget for the project, the deficit faced is significantly greater than that.

"On top of that, we've got to pay for engineering on the project, so we've really only got $850,000 for construction," Faires said.

A still-optimistic Faires said his department will move forward swiftly on the over-budget project.

"We'll need to find ways to be creative in looking for other sources through the private or public sector," Faires said. "Or we'll need to scale down the project."

The 130 sewer line has been lauded as a significant step toward unlocking a world of potential development in the heart of Oconee County.

"We've had a number of people who have been calling and want to develop and want to expand. They want to know when the sewer is going to be available, because their plans are predicated on the availability of sewer at that location," Faires said. "Hopefully, when this project is complete, it will give them some options."

It may be that potential that could provide a possible solution to the funding problem, as Faires said he has been contacting developers who have called in the past two years to inquire about the sewer line to see if they want to participate in its completion. A small portion of the funding may also come from Seneca Light and Water's own pockets.

"I'm pretty cautious on that, though," Faires said. "I don't like tapping into reserves."

Faires said he'd like to come to a decision regarding identifying a funding source or a scale-down of the project by the end of January, though that is not an ironclad deadline. The bids on the contract are good for 60 days.

"Scaling back the project or looking at other ways to do this, that'll take some time. We don't want to be move hastily or limit ourselves," Faires said. "We'll figure something out."

andrew@dailyjm.com | (864) 973-6684