



Minutes

Sussex County Engineers Meeting Saturday, March 16, 2024

1. Introduction:

Bob Wood thanked everyone in the room and on the call for attending. He then introduced Hans Medlarz, Chief Engineer for Sussex County, Patrick Brown, point of contact for Slaughter Beach property owners, and Bob Clendaniel, Zoning Official for Slaughter Beach.

2. Background and Update:

Hans Medlarz introduced some background to the Slaughter Beach sewer district, explained that the engineering is in the planning phase but it is imperative that any property owner (vacant lot or home) in the Town limits of Slaughter Beach **MUST** complete the questionnaire that was mailed to them in February. Once they finalize the Slaughter Beach Sewer District design, it may be very difficult to get your home/lot added.

Sussex County Engineering started their work with a grinder pump system which ran into a problem with the location of the drinking waterlines (Artesian) – the grinder pump system would have required them to rip up the entirety of Bay Avenue and was estimated to send cost overruns into the millions of dollars. Because a price had already been agreed to, in order to keep individual prices down for residents, the engineers decided to look at a vacuum system.

Vacuum systems run on pods, which can cost approximately \$15,000 each. Each pod has a vacuum lateral on the front which runs to the sewer main hook up in the street, and standard plumbing out the back that can run to your home with the standard 4" (four inch) plumbing. Each pod can support up to 4 individual homes but to keep project costs down for property/homeowners the basis of design is to serve 2 homes with a pod as often as feasible. Locations for pods, which are represented by stakes with a green flag on your property, are not final but they are close to finalized.

The ASSESSMENT FEE will not exceed \$1,200 annually – this applies to every single property owner in the town limits (with homes, or with buildable lots) – whether you agree to hook up to the sewer or not, you are obligated to pay this assessment which will be billed annually once the project is substantially complete.

In addition to the ASSESSMENT, anyone that is connected to the sewer lines will be charged for use of the system – it is anticipated that **SERVICE CHARGES will run approximately \$330 annually**, and this will be billed quarterly (like your water) – this amount is set by County Council.

If you did not receive a letter from Sussex County Engineering, or have questions about the location of your stake, or lack thereof, please contact Patrick Brown, Patrick.brown@sussexcountyde.gov

DEADLINE to submit your letter/form back to Sussex County is **MARCH 30, 2024**.

The **ASSESSMENT** is the debt that is required to purchase and build the sewer system over 30 years – every property owner that has SERVICE AVAILABILITY when the project is complete will pay the Assessment Annually. The Assessment pays for the debt required to build the infrastructure for sewer in and to/from the Town. Our max annual assessment per property owner is currently \$1,200.00 and if everyone participates that is eligible, this amount could potentially go down.

The **SERVICE FEE** is your annual cost for all maintenance of the sewer and pods, including battery replacements, and valve replacements, etc. This year it is costing participants about \$330 annually, billed quarterly (four installments). This fee is determined each budget cycle by the Sussex County Council and can be found on their website; sussexcountyde.gov, search for Enterprise Fund and or Sewer.

PERMIT FEE/INSPECTION FEE – Currently set at \$130.00 – DE licensed plumber typically pulls the permit. This covers Sussex County setting up and activating your account and upon notification from the plumber the County inspection/sign-off on the active connection. This connection inspection does not typically delay your use – Sussex County will show up based on the estimated time the plumber provides (so choose your plumber wisely).

A **SYSTEM CONNECTION CHARGE** only applies if you are late joining the sewer system (build a house after the estimated 2027 substantial completion date for instance), currently it's approximately \$7,700.00. If there is a piece of property that is not located near a pod, but can be developed at a later date, this price could be closer to \$50,000 and connection could be denied since it would require a complete shut down of the system.



VACANT LOT:

1. If you own a **VACANT LOT** in the Town limits, you **MUST** complete the form and state that you (a) will never let the land be developed or (b) you agree to participate in the sewer district and understand you will start paying assessment charges when your property has a connection available (possibly 2027).
2. An "available" connection means either a pod serving an existing home next to your lot is located with access to what will be a home on your property or a vacuum lateral is provided to your property for a future pod – it does not mean you are actively using the connection. An vacant lot with available connection will be billed for the annual Assessment associated with having access to sewer.
3. Every property owner that agrees to be part of the final design **MUST** have a completed form or that property owner will prevent completion of the engineering plan. Should this be a serious issue, that property owner will be blocked from being in the system.
4. If **YOU DO NOT** want to the sewer service, you will **NOT** be granted a permit for septic nor a holding tank inside the sewer district, therefore a building permit cannot be issued.
5. If you submit a building plan and request sewer service to your lot, the County **WILL NOT** issue a near term service letter allowing a holding tank *without a time limit*. Earlier iterations have taught the County to avoid significant financial loss, when connections are ready.
6. if you do not have a Certificate Of Occupancy (COO), you will be charged the sewer connection charge new home is approximately \$7,700, however, this is **ONLY** if your lot has access to a pod.
7. For those property owners on the Marsh side of Bay Avenue, if neither the USACE (Army Corps of Engineers) nor the DNREC Wetlands Section have given you a **Jurisdictional Determination** that says you can build a house, the lot will not be served. If you don't get a Jurisdictional Determination, you will not be offered a connection. Lot owners have a year or so to get this sorted out.
8. If you own a lot and you do not connect and are not near a pod - In the future, you can request to buy a pod and connect but it could cost approximately \$50,000 and may require tearing up the street and shutting down the system at the time. This request can be denied.

**HOMEOWNERS/CERTIFICATE OF OCCUPANCY (NEW CONSTRUCTION):**

9. If you own a HOME(S) in the Town limits, you **MUST** complete the form and state that you (a) will connect and accept the location of the pod or (b) you will connect but disagree with the location for reasons you will state, and you will request a meeting or follow up call with Sussex County Engineers.
10. If you have completed your form and sent it with questions or requested changes but have not heard back from Sussex County Engineers, **THERE IS TIME**. If you do not hear from Sussex County Engineering by April 30, 2024, follow up by emailing Patrick Brown.
11. If you have septic/cesspool today – once project construction is substantially complete you will get a letter from Sussex County advising you have 120 days to make the connection to the pod that is being placed for your residence. After 120 days, your Service Fee will start regardless of whether you have made the physical connection. There are occasions that plumbers are behind regardless of agreement so there is not a penalty, but the sewer service fee (once installed) becomes billable to all those ABLE to connect 120 days from the date of availability.
12. You will be out of service based on how long your DE licensed plumber takes to make the connection; the plumber routinely gets the connection permit and notifies Sussex County the date for inspection – it is not Sussex County's fault if the plumber did not give good information.
13. The County does not pay for pumping out or filling of your old system, whether it's cesspool or septic – it is a homeowner's responsibility to engage a properly licensed on-site wastewater contractor to perform the abandonment. Construction of the vacuum system does NOT require you to completely remove your old/existing system but you must fill with porous material (sand / gravel) in accordance with DNREC abandonment regulations.
14. Pod will be about 10' into the property and homeowner runs their own plumbing to the Pod to connect.
15. You **SHOULD NOT** contract with a plumber this far out from connection – Sussex Engineers have had many experiences with homeowners overpaying for service. Give the Town time to send out names of plumbers that have worked with Sussex previously and have been screened.
16. You **SHOULD** consider working with neighbors to have an agreement in place for an experienced handyman to dig your ditches, as this will save you money. However, you must get someone with experience since the pod is **GRAVITY FED**.

**Q&A:**

17. A back-flow alarm is not considered necessary since the pod is gravity fed.
18. There is an alarm should the vacuum fail (at the station) – and Sussex County will be notified to come out to make the replacement – **DO NOT CALL** a plumber to service the pod.
19. Do not drive over the pod, or park on it. There is a vent near the pod (approximately 2-3' away) and if there is a fail, it will overflow to the vent.
20. It is in the homeowner's best interest to block the area around the pod to **PREVENT** guests driving over the pod.
21. The pod is not different from your tank – it does not release a scent, if you **OPEN** the pod, there will be a smell – **DO NOT OPEN YOUR POD**. You can plant shrubs around the pod, but access cannot be blocked.
22. If the pod is on your neighbors property – this is an easement for Sussex County and you are allowed to run your plumbing to the pod from your side of the property.
23. There is a backup generator, and the valve's in the pods are battery operated and maintenance/replacement will be included as part of your service charge.
24. Lack of valve use is not a problem if it's six months at a time, six years with lack of use will affect the valve. If your neighbor is still using the shared pod, the valve is being used.
25. On your property, the water line and sewer line can be close with a vacuum system.
26. The Connection fee will not apply to you if you have a home or are building a home in Slaughter Beach – you must have a Certificate of Occupancy by 2027.
27. The Diameter of the pod is approximately 3' – the hole will be approximately 5-6'
28. Placement next to a utility poll has not been a problem in the last 40 years.
29. Vacuum pumps are noisier than push pumps, however the system and generator will be in a building that is a football field away from any home, and the pump does not run 24/7, it goes on and off. This set up has been used in a dozen neighborhoods in Delaware without issue.

Every person that doesn't respond is holding up the final engineering plan. There will be a hard cut off, likely September 1, 2024.