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Who's gonna own new sewer?

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A temporary deadlock has developed between the city and county over what local governmental agency should own and operate the area's proposed valley-wide sewer treatment plant, tentatively scheduled to become operational in 1981.

Both city and county officials emphasize that the current lack of agreement over what entity should own and operate the federally mandated facility can be resolved quickly, possibly as early as mid-week.

Both sides have minimized the chances of an impasse over the issue, although officials have not cate-

gorically dismissed that possibility.

"I would assume that there always is a potential for that (impasse), said Errol Snider, chairman of the Mesa County Board of Commissioners.

The county commissioner, however, quickly added that the past record of cooperation between the city and county makes that scenario very unlikely.

Grand Junction Councilwoman Jane Quimby also said the possibility of the two reaching a stalemate is minimal. "I hope we don't get in any impasse over this," she said.

Councilman Larry Kosisek said he saw "no problem" in the city and county reaching a quick agreement.

He added that the current lack of agreement will do nothing to delay a construction start for the new facility, expected as early as next spring.

Additionally, Kosisek said, the temporary deadlock should do nothing to hinder a proposed interim sewer expansion plan proposed by a local homebuilders association.

That perspective is shared by county officials. "We are supporting the interim plant," said Snider.

Early last week, the county commissioners and members of the Grand Junction City Council met informally to discuss which governmental entity should be responsible for the \$20 million facility.

Two positions evolved as a result of the informal session.

On the city side, a major concern developed over the loss of a critical annexation tool if the county owns the new treatment plant.

Currently, the city can require any area which requests city water or sewer service to annex as a condition of providing the service.

Because the Ute Water Conservancy District now provides water service throughout the surrounding area, the ability to provide sewer service has become the city's key annexation tool.

Without the annexation power which Grand Junction holds as a con-

dition of sewer service, city officials fear the possibility of the area being surrounded by suburban, county developments which, in turn, prevent the city from continued growth.

"The most important point in the whole discussion, as far as I'm concerned, is that the city be allowed to grow," said Mrs. Quimby.

What city officials don't want is a West Slope analogy of Denver, in which Colorado's largest city has lost most of its annexation power and a corresponding loss of a possible tax base to surrounding affluent suburbs.

City Manager Jim Wysocki said the annexation tool provided in the ability to offer sewer service "is impor-

tant to the city."

The city manager said. "I think it would be desirable to have that tool available."

Wysocki added, "The city has never been imprudent in its annexation policy."

Councilman Larry Brown is another who views the loss of the city's annexation powers as critical. "The city must have the ability to grow," he said.

Brown worried that the city "will die" if it loses its annexation power and wondered about the county's ability "to bail the city out."

Snider said the commissioners are very aware of the city's concern over

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its annexation ability and stressed that the county would make every effort to insure that the city can continue to grow.

"Let's face it," said Snider, "Grand Junction is a very important part of Mesa County."

The county commission chairman said the county's concern over what entity owns and operates the plant is primarily one of "accountability."

"If the city owns the plant, we're concerned that we may be abdicating our responsibility to the county resident," said Snider.

He said, "We absolutely feel we're in a better position to represent everyone."

Snider added that the county's concern is one of a "general nature," rather than something specific such

as fears that the city would charge county residents more for sewer service than in-city users.

Both Snider and Wysocki said federal guidelines virtually eliminate the possibility of discrimination in user fees.

County officials earlier proposed that the city operate the new treatment plant on a contractual basis, leaving ownership with the county.

Few city officials, however, have greeted that suggestion with enthusiasm.

"I feel that the city ought to own and operate it," said Mrs. Quimby. Noting that the city already provides sewer service to its residents, Mrs. Quimby said it's "more practical" for the city to operate the new plant.

She added, "I think it makes more

sense that whoever owns it, operates it."

Asked if the county has the technical capability to enter the sewer business, Snider said he thought the county could develop the ability. "The cost shouldn't be too much different," he said.

Both county and city officials are aware that a protracted debate over what entity should own the new plant can be detrimental to all Mesa County residents.

The commissioners earlier indicated they hoped to develop a formal position last Tuesday. Snider

said, however, the commissioners hope to adopt a position early this week.

Both governmental entities are in the process of formulating budgets for next year. One of them may have to budget for the construction of an interceptor line between the city's existing plant and the new facility near 22 Road and U.S. 6&50.

The interceptor line likely will be necessary if the homebuilders' interim sewer treatment expansion plan is ever carried out.

"We'll have to make a decision rapidly," said Snider.