

## Projects may get stimulus boost

BY JEREMY ROSEN • COURIER-POST STAFF • AUGUST 3, 2009

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The Department of Environmental Protection has approved the construction of three of 59 vital sewer system and drinking water infrastructure projects planned in the tri-county area.

The DEP approved bidding for 27 of 704 project applications filed by municipalities and counties statewide that are seeking a share of \$840 million in federal and state aid.

As of Wednesday, Mount Laurel's Municipal Utility Authority was the only sewer system project in the tri-county area approved to seek bids, while the Willingboro Municipal Utilities Authority and Woodbury can go through with drinking water projects.

The DEP plans to post their decisions on these ranked projects each Wednesday until grant funding runs out.

Other tri-county sewer system and drinking water projects planned in Camden, Camden County and Bordentown City are in line to have construction start with millions of federal stimulus dollars, according to the DEP's most updated ranking list. Other area projects, like some in Deptford, may get stimulus money but are likely to move forward with state aid.

In Mount Laurel, officials plan to go out to bid soon for an estimated \$5.3 million "green" project that would use solar power for the township's main wastewater pumping station and drinking water well off Ramblewood Parkway.

"This is a great thing for the town," said township MUA executive director Pam Carolan. "We wouldn't be getting it done at this speed and maybe not the exact same project because the financial outlay is substantial."

The project is to be bonded with federal stimulus money, which means half of the loan is forgiven with no repayment necessary.

The rest is to be paid back with a low-market interest rate recently quoted at 1.2 percent on a 20-year plan, said Carolan. The project will generate enough energy savings to pay back the loan in eight years, she added.

Carolan said connecting the well, which produces about 15 percent of the town's drinking water, and the station, which handles 20 percent of the wastewater pumping workload, to a field of on-site solar panels will annually save the township about \$90,000 in electric costs. She said the township can also make as much

as \$300,000 per year by selling energy credits to its supplier, Public Service Enterprise Group, under a state program that requires energy companies to be "green."

Carolan said any revenue after the project is paid for will be added to the MUA's budget for upkeep or similar projects to be done at other sites.

Officials expect the construction of the Ramblewood Parkway solar field to start in December and power to be online by next summer.

The Willingboro MUA intends to seek bids by late August or early September for a similar project.

Joe Bateman, township MUA executive director, said installation of a solar panel field at its main water treatment plant at Meribrook Circle will reduce operation costs. That \$2.83 million project is also to be stimulus-bonded, with the balance to be paid over 20 years.

Bateman said it is too soon to say how much of a break MUA users will receive from the solar project that is to be completed next summer.

"We feel proud of this project to use the sun to supplant PSE&G supplied power," Bateman said.

In Woodbury, replacement of a crumbling 1800s reservoir with a \$2.5 million drinking water tank has started, according to Tom Bowe, city clerk administrator.

Bowe said the bid for the project was awarded last month, as the DEP approved the city to seek bids in mid-May.

Woodbury received \$3 million in state aid for the project. Twenty-five percent loan is to be repaid at the New Jersey Environmental Trust market rate. The remainder is state- and federally funded with a zero percent interest rate.

Details of the city's awarded bid or repayment plan were not immediately available.

The project is expected to be finished later this year, providing Woodbury and parts of Woodbury Heights, Mantua, Deptford and Wenonah with a safer water supply and better water pressure.

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