

Sewer authority to spend \$27 million to take the PU out of waste



- AD CRABLE | Staff Writer

Groundbreaking for a \$27 million waste-treatment upgrade at the Lancaster Area Sewer Authority's Washington Boro plant included, from left, Jeffrey Culton, Buchart Horn; Nicholaus Sahd, LASA board member from East Hempfield Township; Brian Funkhauser, Buchhart Horn; Barry Smith, LASA board chairman; N. Thomas Huber, LASA board member from East Petersburg; Edward Fisher, LASA board member from West Hempfield Township; Roy Weitzel, LASA board member from Mountville Borough; and Mike Kyle, LASA executive director.

Save

Disposing of human waste is an unsavory but necessary business in Lancaster County.

With the launch of a nearly \$27 million sewage wastewater treatment upgrade Thursday, the Lancaster Area Sewer Authority will soon be producing a finished product that is about as environmentally friendly as it gets.

After the 18-month project is finished at the authority's treatment plant near Washington Boro, anaerobic digestion and heat drying powered by methane gas will result in a solid waste product, known as a biosolid, that meets the federal government's highest standards, officials said.

That means that 15,000 tons of biosolids that now is deposited annually in the county landfill, eating up precious space, will be able to be re-used and sold commercially as a soil conditioner or fertilizer.

The county's second-largest sewer authority with 37,000 customers doesn't have to do the upgrade. Its biosolids currently meet U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards.

But officials say they chose to voluntarily move forward to reduce the facility's environmental footprint and because they anticipate such high standards will be required in the future.

"It makes sense to be proactive and do this now, before regulations come along and say, 'You shall,' " said Barry Smith, LASA board chairman, at a soggy groundbreaking ceremony.

The project will result in only "nominal" price increases for ratepayers, Smith said.

The authority provides sewer service to Manheim, East Hempfield, West Hempfield, Lancaster and Manor townships, as well as East Petersburg, Columbia and Mountville boroughs.

Until a few years ago, the authority sold its biosolids to be sprayed as fertilizer on farmlands in Lancaster, York and Perry counties. But odor complaints, mainly in Perry County, resulted in the authority shifting to landfilling its waste.

The new process will reduce the biosolids waste by about two-thirds. Moreover, the intense drying process will remove any odor and kill any pathogens.

That means if the waste is again spread on land in the future, there won't be any dangers of runoff into local waterways and the Chesapeake Bay.

That pleases the state Department of Environmental Protection. Eric Lauer, an agency soil scientist, was at the groundbreaking.

"The odor complaints will be gone after this," Lauer said. He said only about a dozen sewage-treatment plants out of hundreds in southcentral Pennsylvania have the highest-class biosolids.

"It does seem to be the wave of the future," he said.

The process will go like this at the 300-acre Washington Boro treatment plant: Waste will go into an anaerobic digester to be constructed. There, bacteria will start to break down the waste. Methane gas produced will be captured and burned to further produce bacteria.

Dewatering devices further remove water and reduce the volume of the waste. Sludge cakes are then taken to a newly constructed dryer fueled by the captured methane gas.

The resulting product is almost completely dry and safe to use in land spreading or to sell commercially.

The authority hopes to sell the biosolids but does not anticipate it to be a significant revenue source, said Mike Kyle, authority executive director.

The project is expected to be completed in mid-2017. It will not result in an expanded workforce at the facility.

Harrisburg-based Buchart Horn is the project manager of the upgrade and expansion. Michael F. Ronca & Sons, Inc., of Bethlehem, is the general contractor. Garden Spot Electric, of Manheim, is the electrical contractor.