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Officials Count Down Days Until Wastewater Treatment Plant Opens

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By [Dug Begley](#)

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FAYETTEVILLE -- Every day David Jurgens takes another number from the sign in his office. Monday, he got to take "97" off the sign, signaling there are 96 days to go before Fayetteville's westside treatment plant starts doing its job.

"It doesn't mean we'll be finished with construction or it'll be pretty," said Jurgens, the city's water-wastewater director. "But it'll have water flowing through it."

The plant should be operational by May 30 after more than two years of construction on the side of Broyles Road south of Wedington Drive, Jurgens said. The sign in his office used to count down the days also bears another reminder for Jurgens.

"It says 'failure is not an option,'" he chuckled during a Monday tour of the westside treatment plant.

In January 2006, the same site where workers scurry to finish the plant was home to cattle. Now it boasts miles of pipe connecting a complex system of filtration and cleaning equipment.

The process of getting the plant online hasn't always flowed smoothly. Delays and cost increases have dogged the project since 1998. The plant missed a 2005 opening officials promised in 2003. Fayetteville officials had to come to voters in September 2006 asking for \$42 million to complete the wastewater improvements, paid for by a local sales tax.

The project has run on time and within budget since late 2006, Jurgens said. Numerous contingencies funds are built into the project's \$180 million cost to Fayetteville. Improvements to Farmington's wastewater system that Fayetteville oversees account for another \$6 million.

Alderman Bobby Ferrell said Monday during the plant tour that he is pleased with the progress.

"I think it's going to start when they said," Ferrell said.

City Council member Adella Gray said those responsible for the progress should be commended.

"It's very attractive from the outside," Gray added.

Jurgens said when completed, the new plant and existing Noland Wastewater Treatment Plant will be able to handle a combined 21 million gallons of wastewater a day. That's enough to provide service for 115,000 residents, according to city estimates.

PLANTING SEEDS

Much more work is needed before the entire wastewater system is completed, Jurgens said. Contractors installing sewer pipes throughout the city continue adding to the system.

OMI, the company hired by Fayetteville to oversee wastewater plant operations at the

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Noland plant, was also hired to manage the first year of westside plant operations. Billy Ammons, regional business manager for OMI, said a small amount of the biological agents that help treat wastewater at the Noland plant will be transferred to the new plant. Those cultures begin the treatment process at the new plant as workers at the plant try to sync the treatment process with the new plant.

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"There is a ton of prep work," Ammons said.

Operating the plant once it goes online should be easier than expected, said Lane Crider, vice president of special projects for McGoodwin Williams and Yates, the engineers hired to manage plant development. New features in plant construction mean far fewer employees can operate the plant, and often can do their jobs from other sites.

Ammons said once the plant is running smoothly OMI can operate both the westside and Noland plants from one site overnight.

"That lowers the overhead dramatically," Jurgens said.

The westside plant site includes a wetland prairie north of the plant, Jurgens added, that has proved to be very beneficial. More than 100 species have been spotted on the wetland.

"We've had bald eagles on the site," Crider noted. "We've had all kinds of things."

Officials are considering adding additional acreage to the wetland prairie that could be used as a so-called wetland bank. The wetland bank could be used by developers who could purchase parts of the prairie to mitigate a lack of greenspace on other developments.

Crider said workers are hoping to perform a controlled burn of the wetland prairie next week to burn off some of the vegetation to encourage other native plants to grow.

INFOBOX one (for A1)

BY THE NUMBERS

Sewer Plant Specs

Some figures from Fayetteville's wastewater system improvement project and other wastewater operations:

- * \$180,683,701: Estimated cost of entire project for Fayetteville
- * 61.5: Percentage of work completed and paid for as of Feb. 11 progress report
- * 21.2 million: Expected capacity of new wastewater system, including existing plant
- * 35,000: Yards of concrete poured at westside wastewater treatment plant
- * 900: Miles driven daily taking solid waste from Noland Wastewater Treatment Plant to landfill
- * 21.6: Miles of new pipe planned around Fayetteville

Source: Fayetteville Water-Wastewater Division

INFOBOX two (for inside)

AT A GLANCE

Sewer spending

Two issues important to Fayetteville's wastewater system improvement project are scheduled for discussion by the city council on March 4. Those are:

- * A construction change order costing the city \$624,500 for completion of the Hamestring sewer lift station that pumps sewage to the new westside treatment plant.
- * The city's proposed water and sewer rate structure for the next four years. The tentative plan is for water rates to decrease in 2008 for residents as a result of a new rate system. Sewer rates will not rise until 2009.

Source: Staff Report

INFOBOX 3 (for inside)

FAST FACT

What's in a Name?

Part of Fayetteville's wastewater system improvement project includes repairing and extending Broyles Road south of Wedington Drive to the westside treatment plant. As part of the project, a sign alerting residents to the project proudly proclaims the achievement and those involved. Except whoever made the sign misspelled the name of David Jurgens, the city's water-wastewater director.

Source: Staff Report

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