

Utility plans \$11 million expansion

By Lesli Bales-Sherrod
of The Daily Times Staff

South Blount Utility District is looking to the future with a six-year, \$11 million infrastructure expansion project, Manager Henry Durant announced this week.

The project will not affect customers' rates, Durant said, but will be paid for through the increased revenue the district is seeing with 5-percent growth each year.

"This fits into the budget," he explained in an interview Thursday, adding the project will be done with 15-year bonds.

Scheduled to begin in January, the project will include the installment of water transmission lines along a nine-mile stretch of Calderwood Highway (U.S. 129), from Four Mile Road to U.S. 411 South.

Water transmission lines are pipes that distribute a large amount of water from one large point, such as the district's water-treatment plant, to another, such as a storage tank.

The project also will entail the replacement of 4-inch water lines along Carpenters Campground, Blockhouse and Montvale roads with larger lines — 12-inch on Carpenters Campground and Blockhouse, 8-inch on Montvale — and the replacement of a 200,000-gallon steel tank near Carpenters Elementary and Middle schools with a 500,000-gallon concrete tank.

"These infrastructure improvements are necessary for us to continue to provide reliable water service to our current customers and prepare for the future growth of our service area," Durant said in a press release carrying the motto, "Proactive Today — Prepared Tomorrow."

"Failure to recognize our community's growing needs and not proactively plan will result in unreliable water service and water shortages for the customers in our area," he added. "I wouldn't be doing my job if I ignored the situation."

The utility's current water transmission lines are almost at capacity. Although the district's water-treatment plant has the capability of producing 8 million gallons of water each day, the water-transmission lines only allow the utility to transport 5 million gallons per day.

Of that, the utility's 14,000 customers use 3.5 million gallons per day.

Phases explained

The project's first phase — replacing water lines along Carpenters Campground, Blockhouse and Montvale roads — will be done in 2007 and will help customers in the Allenbrook and Raulston View subdivisions, Durant said.

Meanwhile, the other part of the first phase — replacement of the water tank off Mystery Way — will provide increased fire protection for Carpenters Elementary and Middle, he added.

Plus, the concrete tank will require less maintenance than the steel tank, which has been in place since 1970.

The installment of water transmission lines along Calderwood Highway will comprise the next five phases:

- ä In 2008, from Four Mile Road to Six Mile Road,
- ä In 2009, from Six Mile Road to Indian Warpath Road,
- ä In 2010, from Indian Warpath Road to Centenary Road,
- ä In 2011, from Centenary Road to Walker School Road, and
- ä In 2012, from Walker School Road to U.S. 411 South.

Each phase will require a separate bid, Durant said.

Effect on residents

After the extension between Four Mile Road and Six Mile Road, 40 families who rely on wells will have the option of becoming utility customers, Durant said.

Meanwhile, about 250 residents are expected to be affected by the expansion. Easements will need to be purchased from some 125 property owners along the east side of Calderwood Highway; others will be affected by the construction process, though "there will be very minimal impact on daily traffic," according to the press release.

Durant said the utility has not yet talked to residents, but that customers in the affected areas will have a letter in their bills this month, inviting them to a community awareness meeting at 7 p.m. Dec. 7 in the Lanier Elementary auditorium.

Those bills will go out in the mail Thursday, Durant said.

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