

2019 YEAR IN REVIEW

CEDAR KEY WATER AND SEWER DISTRICT

John McPherson, General Manager

As with most water and sewer utilities, no year goes by for the Cedar Key Water and Sewer District without a mix of challenges and improvements. The year 2019 was no exception. The following is a summary of the District's year.

Bridge Pipelines.

A long-term goal of the District is to get all water and sewer lines off of bridges and drilled underground beneath the channels. This is an important goal because pipelines attached to bridges are susceptible to damage due to storms, collision, and deterioration. A final three wastewater lines attached to bridges 1, 2, and 3 on State Road 24 were removed in 2019 with partial funding from the Suwannee River Water Management District. In the coming year 2020 the Florida Department of Transportation will pay for removal and drilling of a water line on Dock Street bridge in conjunction with the planned replacement of that bridge. With the completion of that project in 2020, there will no longer be active water or sewer lines on any bridge in Cedar Key. The District expresses its appreciation to DOT and SRWMD for their generous support of these projects.

Disinfectant Byproducts.

A long-term challenge faced by the District has been meeting drinking water standards relating to Disinfectant Byproducts (DBPs). DBPs are created when chlorine combines with organics in raw water. The District's raw water comes from relatively shallow wells located several miles out of town on State Road 24. Because these wells draw from a shallow aquifer, the level of organics in the water can vary widely depending on rainfall amounts. The District tests for DBPs every three months, and the tests during the 3rd quarter of 2019 were high again after substantial summer rainfalls. This resulted in notices being sent to District customers during 2019.

Elevated levels of DBPs do not pose an immediate health risk, and the water remains safe to drink while the District takes steps to bring the levels down. (A recent Article in the prestigious Journal of the American Water Works Association reviewed the evidence and could find no indication that DBPs are actually a health risk. See link to this article on the Resources page of the District's website.)

One way to bring DBP levels down is to switch from chlorine as the primary disinfectant to chlorine dioxide. Chlorine dioxide is an approved and highly effective disinfectant that does not create DBPs the way chlorine does. Two other utilities in Florida with DBP issues similar to ours have made the switch and brought their DBP levels down to zero. Customers may recall notices that went out in 2017 stating that this switch from chlorine to chlorine dioxide was to be tested during that year, but that testing was suspended while the District sought clarification from the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) on some regulatory issues. Since then the District and its engineers continued to work with DEP and a new test of chlorine dioxide took place in 2019. Unfortunately, this test indicated that chlorine dioxide could not be used here due to the particular makeup of the District's raw well water. With the failure of this

test, the District is back to working with its engineers and DEP to come up with a long-term solution to the DBP issue.

Wastewater Treatment Plant Permit Renewal

Every 5 years the District's state permit for the wastewater treatment plant must be renewed. The District contracted with Mittauer and Associates Engineers to prepare the permit renewal application and submitted it to the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The renewal process requires an extensive review of the performance of the treatment plant over the prior 5 years, and must address any problems that the plant had meeting regulatory standards. The permit application was submitted in a timely manner and, after review by DEP, the renewal permit was issued by DEP early in 2019.

Cell Phone Service

During 2019 the District began working with Verizon Wireless on a plan to place cell phone antennas on the District's elevated water tower across from Cedar Key School. The problem of lack of cell service within the school buildings is a safety hazard in this day of reliance on cell phones in case of emergency. Good progress has been made with Verizon and it is expected that antennas will be installed on the water tower late in 2020. These antennas will provide excellent cell phone service within the school and throughout Cedar Key.

Election of Board Members

District governing board members Chris Reynolds and Steven Rosenthal were unopposed in the 2019 election cycle and will retain their seats on the Board for another two-year term.

Building Refurbishment

The District's downtown building housing its administrative offices and wastewater treatment plant received an exterior refurbishment with wood repairs and repainting. Dreyers DKI construction company did an excellent job on this project, as it had earlier done on the building's interior.

Loyal Employees

The District is fortunate to have a group of loyal employees that have worked diligently for the District for many years. As of 2019, the number of years that employees have worked for the District are as follows: James McCain: 41 years; Ann Richburg: 35 years; Alicia Johns: 12 years; Billy Quinn: 12 years; and Gabe Doty: 2 years.

The District maintains a website at ckwater.org, and may be reached at 352-543-5285.