

# Taking Pipe



What happens when a town decides to go onto a sewer system? Is it cheaper and more efficient? Who profits?

The people already living in a town presumably have installed and are using septic or other on-site sewage treatment systems (at a cost of about \$1,500 per household). Installation of the sewer system costs another \$4,000 per household. Because it is often "Federally Funded," most people forget it still costs the same or more but just comes out of our tax pocket instead of our sewer bill pocket. Add another \$250 for a hookup and maybe \$300 to install sewer lines from the street to the house. Then pay \$7 per month forever and lose your nutrients and contaminate your drinking water. The sewer project ends up with expenditure of at least four times the original cost of providing satisfactory sewage systems and duplicates those already working systems.

How about the costs for people building a home once the sewer is installed. We're told it will only cost a couple of hundred dollars to connect instead of \$1,500 for a septic system. However, because a lot with a sewer doesn't require the expense of a septic system it is equal in value to a lot with a septic system, and the developers have probably paid \$200 for a sewer tap and marked the price of the lot up by \$1,500, making a windfall profit of \$1,300. The homebuyer ends up paying the cost of the septic system without receiving a septic system in return! So the costs for serving a new home add up: \$4,000 in taxes to build the system, \$1,500 hidden in increased land cost because the septic system is unneeded, \$300-\$500 for lateral and hookup, and \$7 per month forever—a total of \$5,800-\$6,000 immediately or \$7,500 over 20 years. Or five times the cost of a septic system or as much as 25 times as much as an owner-built compost toilet system. Studies by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance of the Washington, D.C., sewage system show similar figures for larger cities.

Why do it? The main beneficiaries are the developers who can now market land that wouldn't qualify for septic systems and who can gain windfall profits from the public expenditure on the sewage system. *Any community taking seriously its charge to provide needed services at minimum cost to the residents should take a hard second look and consider such things as septic system management districts for all except the highest density locations.*