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— Rich Eggert, 51

Residents oppose building sewage plant on preserved wilderness tract

# Plumsted plan decried

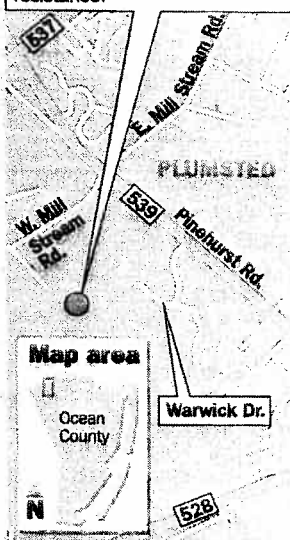


STAFF PHOTOS: BRADLEY J. PENNER

Matt Newkirk of Plumsted and his English pointer, Junie, walk along a pond caused by recent rains on a site where the Plumsted Municipal Utilities Authority wants to build a sewage treatment center.

## Treatment facility planned

Plumsted Municipal Utilities Authority is planning to build a \$44 million water treatment facility. This plan has been met by a sizeable and vocal public resistance.



Staff graphic



Rich Eggert of Plumsted points to a young maple tree growing on a site where the Plumsted MUA wants to build a sewage treatment center.

By KEITH RUSCITTI  
TOMS RIVER BUREAU

### PLUMSTED TOWNSHIP

Few people in the township know more about the expanse of wilderness known as the Lakewood Preservation Area than Christine and Rich Eggert.

The backyard of their home in Woodlands Manor just west of Route 539 leads into dozens of acres of pine trees, preserved forests and wetlands.

“You can see plenty of trees with their roots above the ground already,” said Christine Eggert, during a recent tour of part of the 350-acre tract. “It means those trees already get a lot of water. Now, they

want to discharge 840,000 gallons of water a day here?”

What has the Eggerts, most of their neighbors and many other residents upset is a proposal in the works to divert — or remove — more than 30 acres of that land from the township’s Recreation and Open Space Inventory in order to erect a sewage-treatment facility.

The plan, residents of the Woodlands Manor neighborhood say, would cause more basements to be flooded, trees to be eliminated, wildlife to vanish and rare wetlands vegetation to disintegrate.

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Rich Eggert of Plumsted points to a pond formed by recent rains at a site where the Plumsted Municipal Utilities Authority wants to build a sewage-treatment facility. STAFF PHOTO: BRADLEY J. PENNER

## Plumsted IF YOU GO

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"There are endangered species and plants back here that would be harmed," said Rich Eggert, 51. "The township has to do more research on this, and I feel they haven't."

But the proposed sewage-treatment facility is a centerpiece of the Plumsted Municipal Utility Authority's plan to build a public sewerage system to benefit the Main Street business district and, eventually, a 336-unit senior community to be built by The Kokes Organization.

The township awarded the contract for the over-55 community to Kokes in 2007 as part of the township's Re-development Plan.

Officials in recent months have intensified their push to get a diversion approval from the state. They hope to submit an official application for diversion of the land to the state Green Acres Program later this year.

"For years the PMUA was a functioning body, but we met quarterly or so," said PMUA Chairman Mike McCue. "But things have ramped up lately with the planning of this project. We'd like to get the permits finished this year."

The monthly Plumsted Municipal Utilities Authority meeting will be held 8 p.m. today at the Municipal Building on Evergreen Road.

McCue resigned from the Township Committee last month, citing a potential conflict of interest between his work on the PMUA board and the committee — even though he'd been a part of both entities since 2007.

His seat on the Township Committee was filled by financial consultant Jack Trotta in a special meeting last Thursday.

Currently, the business area on Main Street uses septic systems and cesspools for sewage disposal.

Meanwhile, the senior community, which is planned to be built off Province Line Road just outside of the downtown district, also would benefit from the sewerage system, estimated to cost about \$44 million, according to the PMUA.

Like most municipalities in the state, Plumsted has been hit hard by the recession, with "For Rent" signs a common sight on Main Street.

Officials say they hope a townwide sewer system will

encourage local investment and stabilize declining tax revenues.

"About 60 percent of those businesses have septic and cesspools that aren't even registered with the Ocean County Health Department," said PMUA Executive Director Peter Yiviskaler. "And the health department has been keeping records on that since 1979 or 1980."

Yiviskaler said after years of review of prospective sites, the Lakewood Properties site is the most feasible.

That is why the PMUA began the long, detailed process required to divert land from preserved status earlier this year. One requirement of the process calls for a public meeting on the proposal to get input from residents.

Almost 100 residents attended the June 29 meeting at the Municipal Building, with the overwhelming majority vocally opposing the plan.

"It's a short-term solution for a long-term problem," said Miguel Garces, a resident of Woodlands Manor and a member of the township Environmental Commission.

One requirement for a land diversion is for the township to replace the formerly preserved acreage with a minimum of twice the land for public preserva-

tion. Based on The Green Acres statute, opponents argue the amount of preserved land should be four times the amount diverted because the diversion would benefit private entities.

"We believe the replacement land should be a 4-to-1 ratio," said Theresa Lettman, director for monitoring programs for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance, a nonprofit organization that focuses on Pinelands-related issues.

"I didn't hear the board make the case for a compelling public need for the diversion. It appears this is to benefit private entities that stand to make a profit from it."

Yiviskaler said The Kokes Organization and New Jersey American Water would contribute toward the treatment facility. He said the re-development project also would receive state funding through Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) program.

But the PMUA board hasn't focused on what lands are being looked at for preservation set-asides.

"We haven't gotten that far yet," Yiviskaler admitted. "We're focusing on getting this part done right now."

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