

Reconsidering sewers on Key

County services picking up

OUR VIEW

A recent letter to the editor reminded us of one piece of unfinished business in the region: the continued use of septic tanks on North Manasota Key.

The letter was written by Paul Phillips, a longtime member of the Englewood Water District board of supervisors, now retired. Phillips noted, accurately, that past attempts to extend the EWD's **sewer** lines were beaten back repeatedly by local residents.

Manasota Key was included in the **sewer** Master Plan developed by the EWD in 1996. A community workshop on the issue was held at Lemon Bay High School in 2000. In 2003, came more meetings and more discussion. The following year, Key residents opposed a Board of Supervisors' attempt to do as much as study the engineering costs of **sewer** installation.

Phillips, a strong proponent, was board chairman at the time.

In the past dozen years, other areas in Englewood have accepted the extension of sewers — often grudgingly. The EWD's initial moves to extend lines to new areas stopped due to the economic uncertainty of the recession. In recent years, though, projects on the mainland side of North Englewood have gone forward.

Next step? Across the bridge and onto the Key.

This is inevitable. As the recent Charlotte Harbor Water Quality Assessment clearly showed, septic systems in coastal areas harm the water. This area of Manasota Key is different only in that housing density is lower. It is a narrow sandbar in the Gulf. It is an unhealthy situation.

As Phillips wrote: "Many of the septic tanks on the Key are in the groundwater table, but all of them are in sandy coastal soil. Neither of these conditions can support septic systems."

In the past, residents have argued **sewers** might open the door to increased density and development — something they don't want. No one else wants that either. That's a land use issue and the chances of zoning changes are nil.

Another question is the future of the canopy trees along a long section of Manasota Key Road. That problem must be addressed as best as possible.

But this is a terrible place for septic tanks. We have no illusions this won't be a difficult political struggle. It needs to be engaged, though.

The long Christmas weekend was sunny and warm and unfortunately, at one popular area attraction, a little messy.

Visitors to Englewood Beach Monday encountered overflowing trash cans. It was hardly a Superfund site, but also not the welcome sight visitors and residents might expect — especially when they're paying 75 cents an hour for parking. We heard complaints.

Turns out the county got caught in a bind this year. For one thing, there was no trash pickup on Sunday, Christmas Day. And Monday was the official Christmas holiday.

As county officials explained Tuesday afternoon, trash pickup is handled by a small full-time crew. According to union rules, they are entitled to their holiday. They can volunteer to work the holiday, but they're not required.

A seasonal part-timer might have filled the gap. Problem was, the only part-time employee left recently and no replacement has been hired. No one's even applied.

And so the trashcans runneth over.

A small thing, yes. But not expected on a long, busy weekend? Nevertheless, county officials said the situation would not recur over the New Year's Day weekend. Happy about that.