

A Tampa-based mining company's desire to pipe treated wastewater from Macclenny to its project site a few miles southeast of the city may have hit a snag.

City officials outlined their sizable demands of the Oldcastle Southern Group for *The Press* last week.

Macclenny wants the mining firm to install a pipe large enough to accommodate future growth in the volume of wastewater the city discharges, all on the company's dime. The problem: Oldcastle may not need that much water.

The company wants to syphon off the current discharge volume — some 800,000 gallons per day — in lieu of sucking groundwater from the Florida aquifer. Presently that treated wastewater, also called grey water, is dumped into Turkey Creek.

Oldcastle has not abandoned the aquifer withdrawals yet, either.

It still has a permit application pending with the St. Johns River Water Management District to remove more than 2 million gallons per day from the aquifer.

The water would be used during the initial years of mining to create a lake on which a floating dredge could extract a muddy mixture of water and soil. A nearby plant would then filter out coarse sand and return the remaining mixture to the lake.

The coarse sand will be used to manufacture construction materials like cement blocks, bound for the Jacksonville market.

After the first five years of operation, the company expects its water needs to fall dramatically. Mining could last as long as 50 years, however.

The company plans to buy some 264 acres from DuPont in the southeastern county and mine the tract over 25 years. Depending on demand, Oldcastle could purchase another, similarly-sized tract to extend the life of the mine.

Securing a reliable water source to get the project going is critical for the company.

Oldcastle representative Elizabeth Revelle said the firm would pull its application to withdraw water from the aquifer and avoid the cost of drilling a deep well once a deal to use the city's wastewater is finalized.

That plan would also slow down the pace of mining, she said, because the city's wastewater supply is more limited than the aquifer's.

Still, the city has taken a hard stance during negotiations with the company.

City Manager Phil Rhoden said Oldcastle's initial proposal to install a 1.3 million gallon per day line was not acceptable.

He said Macclenny seeks a line capable of transporting 3 million gallons — the amount the city believes is adequate to handle future growth in the coming decades.

Once the infrastructure is in place, the city would assume ownership and maintenance of the pipeline, Mr. Rhoden said.

He added that the city also wants to ensure enough property is put aside by Oldcastle for future land application of the wastewater once the company's water needs are satisfied.

When mining ceases, the city would take over ownership of the land as well.

The city manager and his assistant and building official Roger Yarborough were also adamant that the full cost of the project is covered by Oldcastle, even related work completed by the city's engineer, Frank Darabi, on the city's behalf.

"We don't *need* them," said Mr. Rhoden. "Environmentally, [reducing discharges into Turkey Creek] is the right thing to do, so that's the reason we'd want to do it; provided there's no cost to the city."

Like Oldcastle, the city also has a back-up plan.

Mr. Rhoden said he's confident the city's permit to continue discharging into the creek will be renewed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), per a meeting with a department representative.

"We have a verbal commitment from them, so we don't need Oldcastle to continue to operate now or to grow in the future," said Mr. Rhoden.

Even if the reuse project with Oldcastle works out, the city still needs the discharge permit to ensure there's an alternative destination for the wastewater in case of any interruptions in its transport to the mining location.

"We must remain self-sufficient," Mr. Rhoden said.

As to whether the mining company will meet the city's demands, Ms. Revelle said, "All final details [of the deal] are being reviewed as of now."

In mid-April, FDEP issued Oldcastle an environmental resource permit, which allows the company to alter the flow of surface water at the mining location.

The company also needs an approval from the Baker County Commission.

The board will consider a special zoning exception application to allow mining on lands zoned agriculture. The designation only allows mining by exception.

That decision has not been scheduled but it's expected some time this year, after Oldcastle nails down its water source.

A separate sand mining project being planned by Lake Wales-based E.R. Jahna Industries needs similar approvals from state, regional and local authorities to move ahead.

It's yet to receive any environmental, zoning or water withdrawal permits.

Jahna's proposed mine is located on several hundred acres northeast of the Walmart Distribution Center and abuts residential neighborhoods along US 90.

City officials said Jahna has not sought to reuse the city's wastewater.

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