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## Who Does One Call When Sewer Line is Clogged?

By Shirley Hayes

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Correspondent

Town commissioners found themselves caught last week between voting for something that felt morally right and fear of taking action that could set an unpopular precedent from the town's point of view.

The problem arose this way. Graham Myrick and his wife were out of town for several days. When they arrived home, they discovered sewage backed up at their house. A plumber was called. Myrick said the plumber put equipment into the line searching for the point of blockage. When nothing was found in the line between house and the town's main line in the street, the plumber said Myrick would have to call the town to get the line cleaned out.

So town workers came and located a blockage in the town-owned line in the street. Then the plumber sent Myrick a bill for \$253. Myrick sent the bill on to the town because the stoppage was in the town's line not his. The town's insurance company balked at paying the bill, claiming the town was not negligent since it was not aware of the stoppage when the sewage back-up occurred.

The town has insurance with the N. C. League of Municipalities. Ray Ledford, a field claims representative with the company, wrote Myrick, "The Town of Fuquay Varina was not aware of your problem until after you called the plumber and incurred a charge for his service."

Town Manager Andy Hedrick said the town pays what it has a legal responsibility to pay. He said he did not see that the town had been negligent since town employees knew nothing of the problem before Myrick reported it.

Commissioner Jeff Wells felt the town should reimburse Myrick because he did just what most any citizen would likely do if a sewage line appeared to be stopped up at a residence. Wells said Myrick assumed it was his problem and called a plumber. He called the matter before the board "an unusual situation." He thought the town should reimburse Myrick.

Commissioner Cindy Sheldon expressed concern that the board would be setting a precedent if it paid the plumbing bill and would be expected to pay in any similar situation. The town manager expressed concern that anyone who has a plumbing problem henceforth will call the town first, not a plumber.

Commissioner Wells made a motion the town pay Myrick's plumbing bill. The motion included a provision that town staff begin immediately to notify all the town's customers "in simple language" about what they should do if a sewage back-up occurs in their homes.

Commissioner Sheldon, still concerned about the precedent set, voted against the motion.

Hedrick shared her concern. "There will be repercussions," he said, suggesting if all residents are told they should call town hall first before seeking a plumber when a sewer line problem develops, the town would probably have to hire additional people. He said the town regularly inspects the sewer lines, but sometimes problems develop between inspections.

Wells, who seemed to feel strongly about the matter, said he knows there are many widows and widowers in town and others as well, living alone and on fixed incomes, and he thinks some would not be able to afford to pay a plumber to seek out the cause of a utility line problem. He wants the town to have a policy for dealing with cases such as the Myricks'.

Meanwhile, Myrick will be reimbursed for the plumbing bill of \$253.