

PERRIS: Enchanted Heights sewer project ahead of schedule



CONTRIBUTED IMAGE Perris resident Luis Ramirez (center) shakes hands with Assistant City Manager Ron Carr while Maria Elena Kennedy, the city's consultant to the Enchanted Heights sewer project, looks on. Work on the \$15-million project is well ahead of schedule.

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Work to install a new sewer system in Perris' Enchanted Heights community is months ahead of schedule.

About 90 percent of the main sewers and lateral connections that run to the property boundaries of the 446-Enchanted Heights residences are complete and the rest should be installed by October.

Once those are installed, work on the final phase of the \$15 million project — connections to individual homes — can begin.

Mike Arme, president of the BHR-Garver West construction company, said he expects to finish all the work by July 2013 — at least six months ahead of schedule.

“We’ve gotten so many positive comments from people saying how grateful they are about getting sewer service,” Arme said. “They are very excited to get this done.”

Arme said one resident has informally adopted the hard hats, preparing them a carne asada lunch every Thursday.

“People here have been good as gold,” he said.

Assistant City Manager Ron Carr and Perris consultant Maria Elena Kennedy visited Enchanted Heights this week to see first-hand progress on the sewer system. The pair has visited Enchanted Heights numerous times since construction broke ground in August to view progress, answer questions from residents and gauge community sentiment.

Community outreach has been vital since plans to install new sewers to replace leaking and inadequate septic tanks were announced in early 2011. The outreach effort in the disadvantaged community has included several individual and small-group meetings between residents and City representatives.

“The City Council’s mandate was to establish a presence throughout the project and be very proactive with our public outreach,” Carr said. “The positive comments we’re receiving from residents shows that our effort has been time well spent.”

Enchanted Heights residents have struggled with inadequate and leaking septic tanks for years, the result of the community changing from a resort area to an urban neighborhood of families including children, parents and grandparents. The increase in population overwhelmed many Enchanted Heights septic systems, sending sewage into streets and fields, causing pools of stagnant water and sewage and creating potential health hazards.

Kennedy said the City’s outreach effort continues reaping rewards, as expressed by residents while construction progresses.

“The people of Enchanted see the value of this project and recognize the importance the City of Perris has placed on improving the quality of their lives and they are most appreciative,” Kennedy said.

The City’s outreach campaign was honored by the Municipal Managers of Southern California, who in May gave Perris their 2012 award for Organizational Excellence. In addition, the project has earned kudos at conferences and symposiums featuring state and federal representatives.

Construction crews continue making progress on mainlines and laterals. About 19,000 feet of the 22,000 feet of main sewers and laterals already are in the ground. The topography in Enchanted Heights is hilly and rocky, posing a further challenge to construction crews but Arme — president of the company installing the system — said workers are meeting that challenge. A special rock trencher had to be imported from Texas to cut through the toughest formations.

Enchanted Heights resident Willis Smith knows exactly what the new sewers mean for him and his family. His septic tank has overflowed, creating a cesspool in his backyard. Three of his dogs died after drinking bad water. He won’t let his 12-year-old daughter play in the backyard.

In another year, the cesspool and associated stench will be history.

“It’s going to make a world of difference,” Smith said.

Enchanted Heights residents Luis Ramirez and his daughter, Daysi, also are delighted. Luis Ramirez said his septic system was failing, which caused it to emit a foul odor and took all the enjoyment out of family barbecues and gatherings on his Lukens Lane lot. The smell drew mosquitoes, too.

“We are happy with the new sewer,” Luis Ramirez said. “The problem with the septic system is being alleviated.”