

Currituck OKs water plant expansion

By Cindy Beamon

© The Daily Advance

Sunday, December 9, 2012

CURRITUCK — After its buyout of private water companies on the Outer Banks last year, Currituck County is taking the next step toward supplying better quality water to the resort.

Commissioners last week approved a \$3.6 million bid for expanding the county-run reverse osmosis water treatment plant. George Raper and Sons of Elizabeth City had the low bid and was awarded the contract.

The expansion is part of a three-phase project to improve water quality on the Outer Banks.

A new water tower costing roughly \$800,000 is already in operation. Besides the RO plant expansion, the county also plans to spend another \$1.1 million to drill deepwater wells. Work is expected to be completed by 2014.

The buyout and upcoming upgrade totaling \$14 million will be paid by customers using the system.

County officials say the project should end any remaining complaints about bad-tasting water with high levels of iron and salt in Currituck's southern Outer Banks.

The existing RO treatment has already solved most of the water-quality issues in communities previously served by private suppliers, said one county official.

This year, the plant was able to supply water without using shallow wells from two previously private water systems — except for one month, said county Engineer Eric Weatherly. For that month, at the height of the summer vacation season, the county mixed RO treated water with well water from the shallow wells, he said. Even that mixture was better than water previously supplied to customers in some developments, said Weatherly.

The expansion will boost the plant's water-treating capacity by about a third. The existing plant can treat about 2 million gallons of water per day. With the upgrade, the plant can supply an extra 1 million gallons a day.

Weatherly said he expects the expansion to meet the immediate demands at the mostly built-out resort. A surge of development in Ocean Sands, which has the largest number of undeveloped lots, could require another RO plant expansion sometime in the future, he said.