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## Briarcliff gets \$19 million in water aid

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BRIARCLIFF MANOR - Federal stimulus money should start flowing soon in the village, which has been awarded nearly \$19 million to revamp its drinking water system.

It's the largest chunk of money given to 14 such projects across the state, New York officials announcing the grants said.

The only caveat is that construction contracts need to be executed by January or the money goes elsewhere.

That won't be a problem in Briarcliff Manor.

"We had a commitment to get this project to bid this year," Mayor William Vescio said. "We've already awarded the contracts."

Village officials had raised water rates to start paying down a 25-year, \$26 million bond, but learned this week that nearly the entire tab will be picked up by state and federal taxpayers through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

State officials estimate the cost of bringing New York's clean water infrastructure up to date is \$27 billion, while the national estimate is \$335 billion.

The \$18.8 million coming to Briarcliff Manor will pay for construction of a new Catskill Aqueduct tap with state-of-the-art controls and water treatment, and a station that will pump 6 million gallons a day.

The new building will be just west of existing pump stations for Tarrytown and Sleepy Hollow along Neperan Road. The work is expected to be completed by May 2011.

Vescio said the recession has actually helped the village solve its water problems because the federal stimulus became available, and construction bids came in millions of dollars less than officials had budgeted.

Gov. David Patterson, in announcing the \$87 million in federal grants, said the projects were chosen to improve drinking water systems, create jobs and protect health.

The grants were handed out through the state Department of Health from a list of shovel-ready projects from New York's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund.

"We're shovel ready all right," Village Administrator Philip Zegarelli said. "I bought the shovels and spray-painted them gold already. This is one of those projects where the planets are in the right orbit."

That hasn't always been the case for the Briarcliff Manor system, which serves 8,800 people in the village, and parts of the towns of Mount Pleasant and Ossining through 2,700 service connections.

"We're the last village on the Old Croton Aqueduct and had a state stipulation to get off of it," Vescio said. "This has been talked about for more than a decade."

The mayor said the village periodically saw spikes in bacteria levels and had to switch to water from Ossining and New Castle, at a cost nine times higher than what it paid New York City.

That led to a \$1 million deficit in a water department budget of less than \$5 million.

Residents also didn't have to separate whites from the rest of their laundry when the switches were made, Vescio said.

"Every time we switch it stirs up sediment," he said. "It wasn't just about safe drinking water. If you washed your clothes in it, your clothes come out all brown."

A regional solution is also planned, Vescio said, possibly by creating a water district with Sleepy Hollow and Tarrytown. The three villages are combining to create a backup connection to the Delaware Aqueduct.

Village officials will assess the needs of the rest of the infrastructure, then decide whether to reduce the water district's rates, the mayor said. Residential water users have paid, on average, about \$1,000 per year.

"Water is a commodity that people take for granted," Vescio said. "We couldn't because of the problems we had."

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