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Three grant applications, one goal: Stop ocean outflow

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CITY EDITOR

In its ongoing effort to halt the discharge of wastewater into the ocean, Boca Raton has filed applications for three grants that could bring in more than \$4 million from the South Florida Water Management District.

Whether the city gets the money or not, Boca is going forward with its project to eliminate ocean outflow, said Utility Service Director Chris Helfrich. The effort is funded.

The City Council recently voted to give City Manager Leif Ahnell the green light to apply for three grants from SFWMD, all aimed at projects designed to find alternative water sources.

Earlier this year, the council voted to bond a major sewer and water improvement project – one that would expand the wastewater treatment system so it can reclaim more treated sewage.

Under Helfrich's watch, the city has already bumped up the amount of reclaimed water it is sending back to the community. The utility chief said that through various projects, lines carrying the water have been extended to areas near Boca Raton High School and Lynn University. These are mainly irrigation lines for large, grassy areas.

Helfrich is eyeing large water users – and has the Broken Sound Golf Course in his sights. The idea is to use reclaimed water for irrigation, freeing up potable water for consumption.

He said SFWMD gives priority to communities that apply for funding under the alternative source system. Even the state legislature encourages that, in a bill that states: "The South Florida Water Management District shall include in its regional water supply plan... development projects that promote the elimination of wastewater ocean outfalls."

"The legislature finds that the discharge of domestic wastewater through ocean outfalls wastes valuable water supplies that should be reclaimed for beneficial purposes to meet public and natural systems demands," the law says.

Helfrich said the city has applied for three grants – one to improve the water treatment plant, one to extend lines and the other to construct a new pumping station on Spanish River Boulevard near Interstate 95.

The city manager has made it his goal to eliminate ocean outfall entirely – and to recycle all wastewater in Boca Raton – in five years.

With all the pluses going for Boca, Helfrich said, he feels there is a "very, very strong possibility of getting the money."

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