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Tooleville water connection project expected to take eight years to complete

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The project's timeline is released as part of a feasibility study done by Provost & Pritchard, Self Help Enterprises hopes to expedite the process

EXETER – The process of connecting Tooleville's water system to Exeter's, which would relieve the small community of longtime water supply and contamination issues, is expected to take eight years.

Information from the feasibility study needed to start planning the project has been unfolding bit by bit, mainly through biweekly meetings held between Exeter city officials, representatives from Tooleville, staff from Self Help Enterprises and Provost and Pritchard, the consultants in charge of the study.

"The schedule was new information we got that the consultants developed," said Exeter City Manager Adam Ennis. "That was the eight-year timeframe for actually being able to go through a process to get improvements in place."

Ennis said that in order to create this timeline, consultants took into account the multiple steps needed to complete an extensive project like this.

"Everything from how long it will take to get funding tied down with the state, to actually draw up plans for improvements and get those out to bid, and then get a contractor on board and get a bill," Ennis said. He added that improvements could also need some preliminary work, like drilling test wells and evaluating the water they yield. Exeter's water system would also need to be improved before the connection can be made. All of this factors into how long the project will take.

"So by the time you run through all of that, between getting the funding through the state and all the different things you have to do to make that happen—that's where they came up with the timeline," Ennis said. He added that a cost estimate from the study came out to about \$16 million, \$4 million more than a cost estimate done in February.

Some involved in the project feel that eight years is simply too long to wait for such a vital task.

“I think it’s disheartening. And I think we can do better, to be honest with you,” said Jessi Snyder, director of community development for Self Help Enterprises. “I certainly hope that we can engage in conversations about how we can accelerate the timeline a little bit.”

Tooleville residents currently depend on biweekly drinking water deliveries and must boil any water that comes out of their taps due to leaks in the water system that allows dangerous bacteria to seep into it. These factors have been affecting people in the unincorporated community since at least 1978.

“If the project had begun last year, eight years would be a reasonable timeline,” Snyder said. “But the problem is that it really began 15 years ago, and there’s been a lot of stagnation and lack of forward progress. I think we need to figure out a way to make up for the time that has been lost. But I’m confident that we could find some ways to work through that, if we all put our minds to it.”