

Pine Lake demands money for condemned land

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`You've heard about a woman's scorn? Hell hath no fury!' - Myra Singer, **Pine Lake** Mayor
In an issue that the mayor of **Pine Lake** compares to the Presidential Parkway controversy, city officials say they are prepared to do battle with DeKalb County over a sewer line designated to run through their tiny town's park. **Pine Lake**'s feisty mayor, Myra Singer, said in an interview last week that DeKalb Public Works Director Jim Pierce had promised her the county would pay for the privilege of running the Upper Snapfinger Relief Sewer line through the municipal park. But Pierce denies making the payment promise.

Specifically, the mayor said the county government recently offered to pay \$4 per linear foot for the sewer easement. That would make the total payment \$5,484 for an easement that Pierce said would run 1,371 feet along Lakeshore Drive. Although leaders of the city which has fewer than 900 residents really do not want the underground pipe - they expect the construction period to cause some inconveniences and the pipe's manhole covers to mar the beauty of the park - councilmembers decided to accept it and use the payment to further improve the park around the small lake which gave the city its name. "We figured to offset the detrimental effect the sewer will have on our park by filling in the ditch that cuts across the park," Mayor Singer said. "That will give us more space for the children to play in." The existing ditch, which carries storm sewage from city streets down to the lake, measures 400 feet long by 3 feet deep by 6 feet wide, according to Mayor Singer's estimate.

From the county's stance, no financial offer ever was made to **Pine Lake** by either Pierce or his representatives. "One design engineer met with the mayor to coordinate the work with the recreational use of the park," Pierce said. "During that meeting, the mayor asked about being paid for the easement and was told that (in order to acquire an easement) from a private person, the county paid \$4 a linear foot. "But I can't recall a case where the county ever bought an easement from a city, and it was the same way when I was with (the state Department of Transportation)," he said.

According to Ms. Singer, her conflict with the county sounds somewhat like the condemnation issue which has burned so long over the Presidential Parkway project. Although not on the order of the controversial parkway project, the laying of the sewer pipeline from Sheila Lane to Hambrick Drive, a pipe that is designed to accommodate the rapid growth of east DeKalb County, could become enmeshed in the same argument. If Gov. Joe Frank Harris signs a bill sent last month from the General Assembly, a committee would be created to affirm or reject a government's plan to condemn public property so that projects such as roads and jails could be built even against the wishes of local officials. Legislators drafted the bill in response to the Georgia Supreme Court's ruling that the state Department of Transportation does not have

authority to condemn park land needed for the completion of the Presidential Parkway. "I think they (county officials) figure they can just condemn our park land, once that bill is signed by the governor, and get the easement for free," she said. "But by darn if I'm going to give him our land. We just might be the city that takes this to the Supreme Court." "You've heard about a woman's scorn? Hell hath no fury!"

In the wake of the apparent confusion, Pierce emphasized that the county definitely wants a good working relationship with **Pine Lake**, and he has not ruled out the possibility of paying the city. Mayor Singer, meanwhile, questioned the motive behind what she perceives as a change of heart by the county. "There was no doubt about what was said (concerning payment for the easement). It was very, very clear," Mayor Singer said.

Photo: HOPING: **Pine Lake** Mayor Myra Singer hopes to fill in this drainage ditch at the local park to provide a nicer play area for her children, Christine (left) and Mandi, and other local youths/ DAVID PENDERED