

Fire officials lobbying for hydrant improvements

By Geri Throne

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OF THE SENTINEL STAFF

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WINTER PARK — Expensive homes on the Isle of Sicily share the same problem as an industrial area on Palmetto Avenue: Neither has fire hydrants.

Areas with no hydrants or inadequate hydrants and mains are throughout the city, say fire department officials who are lobbying for public support for improvements in pipelines and hydrants that may cost \$1.7 million. Improvements requested by the Orange County Fire Department for the area outside city limits that receives city water service would cost an additional \$1.9 million.

The requests are in addition to \$1.1 million in water plant improvements that consulting engineer

Tom Kelley told city commissioners must be done within the next five years. The bulk of hydrant and water main improvements will be done by city labor over a number of years, Kelley predicted.

Maps in the city's downtown fire station pinpoint locations of low hydrant pressures and are dotted with proposed sites for improved or new hydrants. Fire Chief Sid Ballou and assistant chief Mike Malthop said they are asking for 58 new hydrants and improvements to about 40 others. Orange County fire officials are asking for 84 new hydrants.

"We've known for years that we might have a problem," Ballou said.

Many of the requests for improvements were the same ones made by the department in 1974 and 1979, before the city purchased General Waterworks Corp., he said. Fire department officials kept a low

profile about them then because the privately owned utility put fire hydrants low on its priority list and because "we didn't want the people overly concerned," said Ballou.

When Kelley asked for fire department input during his study of the water system, Ballou said he was "thrilled to think that now we were going to have a chance to tell where the problems are."

Annual testing of hydrant flow shows where the problem areas are, he said, acknowledging that the decision on what to improve is now a political one that must be made by the city commission. "They are the controlling factor right now."

Low water pressure has not been a factor in recent

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structure fires, but could be in the future and could also be a factor in insurance rates for commercial structures, Ballou said.

High on his priority list for new hydrants are the Isle of Sicily and Glenridge Junior High School. The school

has one hydrant nearby. Pumping water from Lake Maitland to protect Isle of Sicily homes would be difficult if fire trucks could not get close enough to the lakes or if weeds clogged the lines, he said.

Providing adequate 6-inch water mains to new hydrants in those areas would also help boost water pressure in existing hydrants along the way that are served by smaller mains, Ballou said.

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Other streets and neighborhoods where Ballou wants new hydrants include the west side of town where commercial development is going up near U.S. Highway 17-92; North Lakemont, Hibiscus and Temple avenues and Sunset Drive in northeast Winter Park; Lochberry Road, South Lakemont Avenue, Whitehall Drive and

Banchory Road in southeast Winter Park, and several streets in Orwin Manor and east of Lake Chelton.

When the city bought General Waterworks in December 1981, about \$400,000 a year was allocated for future water system improvements. That amount is expected to cover most plant and pipeline improvements, Kelley said, but extra funding for fire protection improvements may come from other sources, such as other local governments served by the water system or from higher fees or connection charges.