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**NEWS ARTICLE: Gainesville Times on August 26, 2014**

## **Loan to boost Oakwood sewer plans**

Braselton received a state loan Tuesday that will enable Oakwood to tap into a long-anticipated sewer project involving the two cities.

The Georgia Environmental Finance Authority awarded Braselton a \$1.8 million loan Tuesday to replace the Mulberry Interceptor sewer, a 10-inch line built in 1986, and extend sewer service along Ga. 53/Winder Highway.

“This project will provide sewer service to an area that has a history of septic system failures,” states a GEFA news release.

But the project also will allow Braselton to collect and treat sewer flows from Oakwood, according to GEFA.

An area of Ga. 53 between Ga. 13/Atlanta Highway and Martin Road in the South Hall city was especially booming before the Great Recession hit several years ago. The area particularly saw rapid commercial growth, including a Kroger-anchored shopping center at the corner of Ga. 53 and Sloan Mill Road.

But a weakened economy since has slowed the sprawl.

“There hasn’t been a real high sense of urgency over the last couple of years because we haven’t had the demand on the system out there,” City Manager Stan Brown said.

Oakwood has reserved 50,000 gallons of sewer capacity from Braselton as part of an agreement with the city and could seek up to another 75,000 gallons, for a total of 125,000 gallons, Brown said.

“This (project) will get us in a mode where we can go ahead and, hopefully by the end of next year, be in a position to go ahead and start shifting flows to Braselton, which will reduce our demand and impact on the Flowery Branch plant,” he said.

The move “is good for all of us,” Brown added. “It brings additional sewer capacity into play, so that’s good.”

Because Oakwood doesn't operate a sewer system, it has forged agreements with neighboring sewer operators, such as Gainesville and Flowery Branch, to provide the service to customers in the city.

The total cost for the Braselton project is \$3.55 million, with the city receiving \$292,500 from the Appalachian Regional Commission and \$1.4 million in Oakwood capacity fees.

Braselton must pay back the loan at 1.03 percent interest over 20 years, according to GEFA.

The project, however, didn't necessarily hinge on the state loan, Brown said.

"We could have done some other work that probably would have needed a different funding strategy," he said. "But (the loan) seemed to be the most cost-effective way to go. ... This will put us on a track to getting (the project) completed."

Jennifer Dees, Braselton's town manager, couldn't be reached for comment.

Overall, GEFA awarded loans totaling \$72.7 million Tuesday to 19 Georgia communities for water, sewer, solid waste and wastewater infrastructure improvements.

Among the recipients were Baldwin, which got a \$1.6 million loan to, among other things, build a new storage tank; and Lumpkin County Water & Sewerage Authority, which was awarded \$1 million to pay for several projects, including building a new water supply well.