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## City's daily wastewater fines come to an end

Haskel Burns, American Staff Writer 8:01 p.m. CDT August 23, 2016



(Photo: File photo)

Hattiesburg's latest set of fines for failing to meet deadlines for a new wastewater treatment system, which have cost the city \$1,500 per day since May 1, came to an end Aug. 18.

Mayor [Johnny DuPree](#) said a meeting last week between city officials and representatives from the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality and Gulf Restoration Network was sufficient to reach an agreement between all parties to stop the fines, which have totaled \$163,500.

"They've agreed to stop the fines and penalties, as we continue to negotiate, hopefully, the consent decree and the court order that we have," he said. "And in the process of that, we're going to be looking to see if we can lower the fees that were imposed last month."

The fines began after the city missed its court-ordered deadline to begin construction on a new system. That's in addition to the fines that began last September, after the city missed a deadline to have design plans for a new system finalized and submitted to not only the appropriate state and federal agencies for approval, but also to the U.S. District Court that is overseeing a suit brought by Gulf Restoration Network, an environmental advocacy organization based in New Orleans.

That first set of fines officially came to a halt Jan. 13, after council submitted plans for a land application system to the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality, but they still will cost the city about \$201,000.

Earlier this month, Hattiesburg City Council members voted to make the switch to a mechanical treatment system after deciding the land application method was no longer a viable option for the city.

"That kind of changed the whole landscape," DuPree said. "So it's given us a new opportunity to revisit this whole issue, and GRN has been very gracious in allowing us to negotiate with them and try to come up with a solution.

"We don't know how it's going to end up, but we're negotiating. And MDEQ and GRN have been gracious enough to listen to us, so we're going to continue to negotiate."



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[Hattiesburg council votes for mechanical application](#)

(<http://www.hattiesburgamerican.com/story/news/local/hattiesburg/2016/08/02/hattiesburg-council-votes-mechanical-application/87978254/>)

The next step on the [road to mechanical treatment \(/story/news/local/hattiesburg/2016/08/10/whats-next-hattiesburgs-mechanical-system/88403698/\)](#) will consist of an \$8 million access road and bridge leading from James Street to the current lagoons, which are located on the west bank of the Leaf River. That project is expected to begin in the next 30 to 60 days, with completion in February or March.

Site preparation would come next, followed by a \$115 million treatment facility, which will be built on city-owned property adjacent to the lagoons. The city now has a deadline of September 2018 for construction of the facility, which will be on 30 to 40 acres.

Once the treatment facility becomes operational, the lagoons will be phased out and will no longer be used for wastewater treatment. Total cost of the project, including partial lagoon closure, is expected to run in the neighborhood of \$135 million.

"This (agreement) really gives us a lot of time to do some things," City Council President Carter Carroll said. "We get to slow down and look at the best alternative and the least expensive alternatives for us. It's a major break for the city, it really is. This is some good news."

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