

AI Summary: Fort White — To Operate Or Not To Operate — That Is the Question

The Town of Fort White, Florida, faces a critical decision about the future of its water and wastewater systems. At a March 11, 2025, workshop, Utility Engineer Mike New recommended refurbishing the town's existing water plant rather than purchasing bulk water from the North Florida Water Utility Authority's (NFWUA) Ellisville plant, located eleven miles away. He warned that the long pipeline would cause water to sit for roughly four days, degrading chlorine levels and potentially creating cancer-causing disinfection byproducts.

Meanwhile, the town's nearly \$22 million grant-funded wastewater project is significantly behind schedule, with a DEP-required mandatory hookup ordinance still unenacted. Engineers stressed that the town must quickly establish impact fees, set monthly rates, and begin adding customers to keep the debt-free system financially viable.

The NFWUA, which derives most of its revenue from Fort White's ~339 accounts, offered to pay the town \$25,000 annually for continued service - a proposal met with resistance.

Mayor George Thomas raised concerns about funding the sewer system without water revenue, while Councilwoman Monica Merricks argued that surrendering utilities would mean surrendering the town's economic future. Former Commissioner Jody DuPree warned that political indecision could lead to DEP forcing a costly county takeover.

The Town Council is scheduled to make a decision on Monday evening.