

Big plans, trickling cash

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TAMPA — Count Mayor Pam Iorio's ambitious plans to expand reclaimed water service and improve drainage as another casualty of the crumbling economy.

Fewer utility customers due to home foreclosures and lower-than-expected revenue means city officials have to slice \$230 million from plans that would have cost \$474.5 million.

The city wanted to issue bonds to do the work, but the water department's latest figures show income will be \$10 million less than expected this year. The decline comes even as the city is in the middle of a five-year plan that raises water rates.

"We pure and simply do not have the revenue stream to make the payments. We are just dealing with the reality of the impact of the economy," said Steve Daignault, head of utilities and public works. Tampa has lost more than 3,000 utility accounts since 2007. Meanwhile, unpaid bills have reached more than \$800,000, compared to \$550,000 in 2007.

Among the projects on the chopping block: a drainage system to alleviate flooding around Dale Mabry Highway and Henderson Boulevard, an expansion of the reclaimed water system in South Tampa; and upgrades to water pipes. Daignault said those projects and others will be deferred.

"All of this shows you where we are in terms of the economy and the impact it's having on government," said City Council Chairman Tom Scott. "It's disturbing."

On the bright side, bagging those projects will free up money to fast-track a handful of other projects.

A pump station on Alline Avenue near Bayshore Boulevard will move forward sooner than expected. People who live in the neighborhood have been dealing with severe flooding for years.

And the city will use \$1 million to supplement a \$1.3 million federal grant to dredge canals in South Tampa. Plans had called for paying for that project with an assessment on people who own property along the canals.

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