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# News Profile

## Sussex County Utility Planning Director John Ashman

Georgetown, Del., March 21, 2006: John J. Ashman knows the pressures and deadlines of the private sector.

As a co-founder and one-time owner of a Selbyville, Del., business that manufactures steel support towers for overhead highway signs, meeting contract deadlines and delivering a product as promised were essential to Ashman and his company's success.

"Each day we didn't make a deadline was a day we lost money," said Mr. Ashman. "You have penalties, what's called liquated damages, which can run anywhere from \$10,000 to \$100,000 a day. In essence, time is money."



John Ashman

It's that kind of business philosophy that Mr. Ashman is bringing to his new job as the Director of Utility Planning for Sussex County's Engineering Department, the division that is responsible for, among other things, reviewing developers' concept plans for wastewater systems built to accommodate new housing projects.

Sussex County must review each concept plan for a new wastewater collection system to ensure it complies with the county's regional sewer plans. This helps developers map routes for their sewer pipes -- between their projects and existing county-managed pipelines -- so neighboring homeowners can later connect, usually at a lower cost.

For Immediate Release

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One of the first goals Mr. Ashman has set since taking the job in early February is to speed up the review process for sewer projects that come through his office. What has been taking weeks, and in some cases months, Mr. Ashman hopes to soon have whittled down to no more than 30 days. "I've been on the opposite end of the spectrum, when I've been waiting for the designs or specs to come in from the engineer," Mr. Ashman said. "I know what it's like to have a project held up in review."

**Name:** John J. Ashman  
**Age:** 42  
**Residence:** Dagsboro  
**Occupation:** Director of Utility Planning, Sussex County Engineering Department  
**Responsibilities:** Oversees a division of four planners who review plans for extending privately built wastewater systems that connect to public sewer, to ensure those systems meet county specifications; assists and will eventually take lead on public sewer studies  
**Background:** Formerly owned a Selbyville-based company that manufactures steel support structures for overhead highway signs; performed managerial, design and engineering duties with the company up until and after its buyout by a national firm in 2004  
**Education:** associate's degree in architectural and mechanical detail from York Technical Institute in Pennsylvania

Some of the delays at the county were the result of the increasing volume of work coming into the department and to the desk of Assistant County Engineer Russell Archut, who up until recently also served as Director of Planning & Permits. The latter title has been split into two new positions: Mr. Ashman has taken on the role of Director of Utility Planning.

Mr. Archut said having someone dedicated full-time just to the review and approval process for utility planning will no doubt mean a more acceptable waiting period for those building sewer systems. And it should ease the backlog of plans, which Mr. Ashman estimates at two dozen.

"I know John's position will help ease that workload," Mr. Archut said. "And he's owned his own business, so he has the experience that will help him coordinate the activities in that office."

Mr. Ashman said, in the end, he's about good, efficient customer service. "We don't want to hold someone up because of something on our end," Mr. Ashman said.

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*This is the second in an occasional series of profiles about some of the newest members of Sussex County government.*