

Drilling to begin soon for water pipe beneath the Thames River

\$1 million project will expand service for towns on west side

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Day Staff Writer

A Wisconsin contractor is preparing to drill a tunnel for the pipeline that will run beneath the Thames River, connecting water sources on either side of the waterway.

InterCon Construction Inc. of Madison installed 42-inch-wide steel casings last week for the tunnel openings on the Montville and Ledyard sides of the river. The firm's manager, Steve Allen, said the Mohegan Tribe's \$1 million project is a relatively simple one in the high-tech world of "directional drilling."

The tribe hired InterCon two weeks ago and, with a handful of other consultants, is set to decipher the "mathematical puzzle" associated with engineering the pipeline, which will extend for about a quarter-mile, Chris Clark, the tribal utility's operations manager, said.

Ultimately, the line will carry as much as 1.9 million gallons of water a day beneath the riverbed.

The line will funnel water from Groton Utilities' east-of-the-river supply, the region's largest, to towns on the west side of the river. Water also will be moved through various municipal lines, tanks and pumps to the north and south as well. If water has to be directed eastward, toward Groton, municipal meters,

valves and tanks can be adjusted to make that happen, too, Clark said.

After a tunnel is drilled in the riverbed, the 1,500-foot-long, 20-inch-wide plastic pipe will be fused together in sections and pushed through the tunnel. NRG, a firm located west of the river in Montville, has allowed the tribe to store sections of pipe on its property.

Sometime in mid-March, Clark said, InterCon will snake the entire pipeline from one shore to the other in about six hours. The line will begin delivering 200,000 gallons of water a day from Groton to the rest of the region six weeks later. Full capacity will be reached after a Ledyard holding tank is built this spring, Clark said.

Entec Inc. of Calgary, Alberta, Canada, is supplying the polyethylene pipe that will be buried 10 to 12 feet beneath the riverbed and under, at the river's deepest points, as much as 35 feet of water. To withstand the geologic and water pressure, the high-density plastic pipe is two inches thick, Clark said.

The pipe has been tested to resist crushing when it is filled with water or if it is empty, Clark said. Its life expectancy? One hundred years.

Drilling into the ground horizontally and running pipe through a tunnel is not a new concept or especially difficult to accomplish, Allen said.

InterCon's last job in Connecticut took place about three years ago and involved running a telecommunications line underground in Greenwich, he said.

See **WATER** page **D6**

INSIDE REGION

MONTVILLE

Lawsuit Filed Over Crash

Parents of two teens injured when the truck they were riding in collided with an ambulance are suing the town. **D2**

EAST LYME

Rise in Assessments Expected

Homeowners are told to brace for higher property assessments after a townwide revaluation. **D3**