
CHAPTER 4

UTILITIES: WATER, SEWER, POWER AND HEAT

Developing and connecting the needed utilities will affect your budget and long-term costs. The land may not have access to municipal services like sewer and water, and need a well and septic system. The source of your electricity and distance from the transformer to the home will have an impact on your costs. Alternative sources include fuel oil, natural gas, propane, solar or wind energy.

WATER

Does your land have municipal water?

If you answered yes, skip to Municipal Water

If you answered no, start here.

If there is no municipal utility service to your land, you'll have to develop your own. The advantage to developing your own water system (well) and septic (private sewer system) is that you never have to pay for water or sewer. The disadvantage is that you have to develop your own well and septic system.

The Well

A well supplies water to your home. The water table varies widely from area to area. The depth drilled to reach water and any water treatment required will affect the price of your water. This will impact your budget.

A well is drilled until water is found. The well requires casing to line the well, a pump to get the water to your home, a holding tank, and sometimes a water treatment system.

Municipal Water

Many towns provide municipal water services. A water main runs under the street outside your home delivering clean, treated water to all who tap-in to the system. Most areas that have municipal systems require you to use them. Municipal water systems charge for their use by metering the amount of water used.

A water line is run from your home to the street, where a municipal crew taps in to the water main. Everyone involved in any aspect of tapping into the municipal waterline system will charge for their services. You can and should find out all of these costs in advance.

SEWER

Does your land have municipal sewer?

If you answered yes, read on

If you answered no, read the following section on septic systems

If your municipality provides a sewer system, you're in luck. Remember, most municipalities that provide sewers require their use and charge for the service. You will be billed quarterly for your sewer use.

Hooking up to a sewer requires a pipe to be run from your home to the street. Then, either a city crew or a certified plumber connects or taps in to the sewer line.

Costs will vary and depend on the distance from the sewer line to your home.

Does your land require a septic system?

If you answered yes, read this section

The Septic System

The purpose of a septic system is to retain solid waste in a tank and to dispose of effluent waste water into the ground without contaminating the environment. In simplest terms, a septic system consists of a holding tank which retains solid waste and grease from household waste water, and an absorption system or "leach field" which disposes of liquid wastewater or "effluent" which leaves the septic tank for absorption below ground into soils at the property. There are many types of leaching systems but the most common is a network of perforated pipes buried in gravel-filled trenches. The specific type utilized on a particular property depends on the soil conditions and the amount of space available. Galleries, seepage pits and sand beds have historically been used. Septic systems will need to be pumped out every few years.

When building a system, first you have to determine how big and what type of system you will be required to have. This is determined by local health department regulations based on a perk test. The local Code Enforcement Official or local Health Department can tell you who to contact to perform a perk test. A perk test determines how much liquid your land will absorb during a predetermined amount of time. The Department of Environmental Conservation may have to approve the system as well.

The more involved your septic system is, the more expensive it will be. The size of your septic system is not optional, but determined by these and other factors. Everyone involved in any aspect of the septic system installation and pumping will charge for their services. You can and should find out all of these costs in advance.

POWER & HEAT

New technologies such as solar and wind may some day provide enough energy to supply your home with electricity and heat. Most families still need conventional sources for these utilities.

Electric utility companies are regulated by New York State Public Service Commission. You will need to apply to the utility companies for new service. Some utility companies can also provide natural gas. You need to contact the utility company that covers your specific location. Distances from the source of the supply to your home will be a big part of your costs.

In addition to electricity or natural gas, there are alternative sources of heating such as fuel oil and propane. It is recommended that you investigate the costs and benefits of each type and determine what works best for your family. You will need to decide what you are using prior to placing your order for your factory-built home.