

Update from the Woodridge Lake Sewer District

By Ray Turri, Chair, Woodridge Lake Sewer District

The summer edition of *Breezes* was a wakeup call for many residents of Woodridge Lake. Explaining our sewage collection system, the antiquated treatment facility and filter beds, and the possibility of expecting costly alternatives to satisfy the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (CTDEP) caught many people's attention. The crisis has fostered new interest and involvement by residents. The District Board is working to take thoughtful, decisive action to map an acceptable, economic and practical way forward for its users/taxpayers in agreement with local and state authorities.

At the July Board Meeting, Ray Turri was elected as Sewer District's new chair. He takes over from Bob Mosca who has been a volunteer with the Sewer District for many years. We thank him for his many hours of attention to the challenges and issues during that time.

Our goal, as a board, over the next few months is to make sure that user/taxpayers of the WLSD, fully understand the system's complex situation and any options – and their cost implications – that may be pursued to address CTDEP's requirements and maintain the viability of our sewer system.

The District Board has identified the major issues and organized new committees to deal with the priorities. The Planning Committee is chaired by Ken Green, with members Jim Mersfelder, Chip Roraback and Ray Turri (as board liaison). This committee is conducting an environmental and regulatory review, identifying long term options and their consequences, facilitating public meetings and other communications necessary with WLSD taxpayers and other relevant parties, and working with the District Board to insure that an appropriate and final alternative is selected and implemented.

The Finance Committee is chaired by Richard Reis, with members Dwight Kellogg, Lou Friedrich and Ed Stemple (as board liaison). They will review all financial procedures, budgets, funding sources, collections, reserve policies, audits and controls, bonding capacity, investments and fixed asset policies.

The Operations Committee is chaired by Jim Mersfelder, with members Charles Ekstrom, Louisa Roraback, Tom McKiernan, Martin Connor and Chuck Karnolt (as board liaison). This committee will address issues surrounding workplace health and safety, regulatory compliance, employee environment, equipment and infrastructure maintenance, risk management and project management. They will strive to improve the efficiency of the operation and provide a safe, secure, and supportive work environment for its employees. They will work with the staff via the general manager to review current methods and, as required, develop improved standards, methods and procedures, facilities and automation alternatives, as well as support priorities. The committee will provide guidance to the District Board on the operation of the sewer plant in meeting the local, state and federal regulatory requirements.

Since the last update in June, the District Board and committee members have:

- Corresponded with Paul Stacy the Director of the CTDEP's Planning and Standards Division.

- Met with Ann Straut-Esden, Sanitary Engineer at the CTDEP assigned to our facility to discuss the current situation and agree to a September date to review a number of technical issues and possible options in moving forward.
- Rented a large trailer to move the plant superintendent and support office staff from the current facility and provide a location to gather and organize all our documents and other information in one place.
- Completed a qualifications-based selection process (QBS) that can result in becoming eligible for a state Clean Water grant of funds that could finance up to 55 percent of the engineering expenses associated with planning to bring the system into compliance. The CTDEP has assisted in the QBS process and will be asked to review and agree on the scope of work going forward. The scope of work includes a regulatory review, disposal evaluation, capacity management, treatment improvements, regionalization options, meeting with CTDEP, financial planning and funding assistance, public education, outreach and participation, as well as developing an action plan outlining the proposed scope of work required to achieve compliance with the CTDEP standards. Three highly qualified engineering firms submitted proposals to the QBS evaluation committee.
- Woodard & Curran, a waste water engineering firm from Cheshire, CT, has been selected as a result of the QBS process to assist us through the facilities plan update and action plan process with the CTDEP.

It is likely that there will be expensive solutions to our problems that will affect everyone in the WLSD. While we are systematically identifying the priorities, conducting the necessary research and identifying alternatives, we are still subject to the approval of the CTDEP. Unfortunately, all alternatives appear to include the necessity of funding a very expensive capital project. The District Board and committee members will be working to identify sources of grants and low interest rate funding sources to accomplish these needed capital upgrades.

While we are most grateful to the District Board members and to the very active new volunteers who have stepped up to the plate, we would appreciate more people becoming actively involved in either one of the committees, or especially to agree to become a member of the District Board of Directors. In case of concerns about any liability, we have secured directors' and officers' liability insurance that protects our board and all volunteers.

We invite all taxpayers to a public information meeting on the issues at the Woodridge Lake Clubhouse on Saturday morning October 2 at 9:00 am. We hope that even before that meeting, we hear from many of you who want to volunteer at this critical time. Please call the WLSD office at 860-491-2705 and leave your name and contact information. A member of the District Board will return your call.