

Major Expenditures Ahead for Sewer District

More than 50 taxpayers attended the Woodridge Lake Sewer District's October 2 community meeting to learn about looming regulatory and financial challenges. The presentation and Q&A session lasted more than two hours and the feedback from attendees suggested that they had learned a lot of new information. A number of taxpayers also expressed concern about the potential costs of the long-term resolution of the District's wastewater collection, treatment and groundwater disposal problems.

As detailed at the meeting and in previous communications, the District has been operating under conditions of a consent order issued in 1989 by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). These conditions relate to the hydraulic capacity of our filter beds that the DEP believes are not absorbing all of our wastewater and the nutrient levels (nitrogen and phosphorous) of the wastewater exiting our plant. The DEP has expressed in both letters and meetings over the past six months that the District must take prompt action to remedy this situation.

The WLSO Planning Committee has taken the lead in responding to the DEP and working with our consultants, Woodard & Curran, to find an environmentally and financially acceptable solution to our wastewater problems. Four members of the Planning Committee and our consultants met with six DEP officials on September 27 to review a number of ideas and technical matters that could form part of a long-term solution to our disposal issues. The meeting was a productive exchange of ideas and the District followed up with a letter outlining the conclusions and matters to be pursued further. At the beginning of November, we had not yet received a reply to our letter.

The biggest issue the District faces is getting our wastewater into the ground of our filter beds and keeping it there. The District operates under a DEP groundwater permit that requires us to keep all of our wastewater in the ground for 21 days travel time and not have any of it emerge as surface water. This is in contrast to the Litchfield Water Pollution Control Facility (WPCF) that operates under a surface water permit and discharges its wastewater directly into the same Bantam River watershed as WLSO. This permitting difference allows Litchfield to be grandfathered from compliance with changes to DEP water quality classifications, but forces WLSO to meet increasingly demanding groundwater requirements.

The DEP has designated most of the watershed in this area with its AA water quality classification which is its highest classification and reserved for drinking water quality. The rationale is that the DEP wants to preserve and protect surface and ground waters from degradation. The DEP has the right by statute and regulation to issue water quality classifications and wastewater disposal permits. The DEP will not issue any new surface water permits in our watershed. WLSO must achieve compliance with current treatment and disposal requirements to renew its groundwater disposal permit or pipe its effluent to Torrington for treatment and disposal.

The Planning Committee, working with Woodard & Curran, is examining three alternatives to meet the long-term needs of the District:

1. Existing plant with groundwater recharge
2. Upgraded plant with groundwater recharge
3. Pipeline to Torrington WPCF

It is unlikely the DEP will issue WLSO a new groundwater permit without significant improvements to the treatment plant to remove nitrogen and phosphorous from our wastewater. Considering what plant upgrades may be required revolves around the DEP's desire to have WLSO utilize "best available technology" in our plant versus fair and comparable standards used by other facilities. Dealing with the

groundwater disposal issue revolves around how much of our wastewater is getting into the ground and not emerging into a surface water environment. Note that despite prior engineering studies which concluded otherwise, at this time District staff cannot find any visible evidence that our wastewater is not getting into the ground and staying there. In addition, Woodard & Curran has identified an alternative method of groundwater disposal that a high conductivity (permeability) zone may exist at the interface of the bedrock and the overlying glacial till. Tapping into this zone might meet the DEP requirements in a less costly manner. More work on these alternatives, along with examining the capital and operating costs of piping our effluent to Torrington, lies ahead for the District and its consultants.

The Planning Committee and Woodard & Curran are developing a Scope of Work for the updating of our Facilities Plan that will deal with these and other issues. Other issues to be addressed include the substantial inflow and infiltration of both rain and groundwater into our collection system, environmental assessments, flow and pollutant loadings, and data monitoring of our collection system. All of these tasks need to be done thoroughly and professionally as the long-term costs (potentially up to \$20 million or more in capital costs) and consequences to the community are large. The Planning Committee forwarded a proposed Scope of Work for a Facilities Plan update to the DEP at the beginning of November. The cost of this work is estimated at \$560,000 and is being submitted to the DEP for a planning grant under its Clean Water Fund. As the Planning Committee went through a DEP required Qualifications Based Selection process for selecting our consultants, we expect the DEP will approve a grant for 55% of the cost of this work leaving the District with 45%, or approximately \$250,000. While the District has sufficient cash reserves for its share and included \$250,000 in the 2010-11 budget for related items, the Planning Committee will take this request to the Board and to the taxpayers in a WLSD meeting for approval.

We are planning our second community meeting to be held at the Clubhouse on December 18th at 9:00 am immediately following the Woodridge Lake Property Owners Association Board meeting which begins at 8:30 am. While we appreciate this is not good news we are sharing with you, we feel it is our responsibility to keep you well informed and involved in the matters and decisions facing the sewer district and the Woodridge Lake community.

Planning Committee
Woodridge Lake Sewer District

<<BOX STORY>>

Woodridge Lake Sewer District Infiltration Update

Dear Homeowner:

Several months ago we indicated that the district has a significant problem with rainwater finding its way into our system. Our staff is continuing routine inspections of our sewer collection system to locate sources of groundwater infiltration. We are finding cleanout pipes which have become disconnected from the sewer pipe. This allows both groundwater and silt to enter the sewer system and could potentially block sewer lines and cause a backup into homes.

This problem could cause significant damage to a home and is contributing to the non-wastewater entering our system. Our sewerage system has been limited by the DEP to processing 100,000 gallons of water per day. As a result of ground water entering the system we have seen spikes as high as 300,000 gallons per day after rainstorms.

Homeowners can perform a simple inspection to check their sewer cleanout. First; locate the cleanout pipe, a white 4" capped pipe between the house and the sewer main. Call the sewer district (860-491-3474) if you need assistance locating the pipe. By hand, try to rotate and lift up on the pipe. If it does not move there should be no problem. If it does move, or if you see any damage to the pipe, contact a licensed plumber to do the repair.

If you have any questions please call me at the plant at 860-491-3474. If I am not there, please leave a message. We'll send one of our employees out to verify the condition. You can help protect your property and solve this problem with this simple check.

Thank you,

Charles J. Ekstrom III
Superintendent