



INTEROFFICE MEMORANDUM

DATE: March 27, 2009

TO: Bruce Thibodeau, Director

FROM: Tim Willett

RE: Minutes from Public Meeting on March 25, 2009
Proposed Sewers in Encapsulated Areas

In attendance were Director of Public Works, Bruce Thibodeau, Health Director Susan Sawyer, Superintendent of Water and Sewer Tim Willett, and about 100 residents.

Bruce Thibodeau introduced Susan Sawyer of the Health Department and Tim Willett of DPW. He asked all residents to sign in and thanked them for coming. The purpose of this public meeting was to get public input and response to the proposed sewers in Encapsulated Areas. Mr. Thibodeau stressed that no decisions have yet been made regarding these sewers and their associated costs. The Town has completed sewer installation in the Lake Cochichewick Watershed, and has recently compiled a Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, CWMP, a planning tool to address sewer needs beyond the watershed. Under the CWMP, Priority Areas were identified for the next 20 years. The Encapsulated Areas were selected not based on environmental factors; they are surrounded by existing sewers and some streets need to be paved.

Mr. Thibodeau then outlined a Capital Cost Comparison, including septic system replacement, sewer construction costs, and betterment percentage. The betterment percentage around the Lake was 20%, which is low but had a town-wide benefit of protecting the Lake from contamination. A 60% betterment was used in the example. Two ways to pay the betterment assessment are total lump sum or 2 payments per year with interest for 20 years. A brief schedule was presented for sewer installation: Appropriation of Town Funds at Town Meeting, Sewer Permitting and Design, Construction, and Betterment Assessment.

Susan Sawyer then discussed septic systems and Title V inspections. Over the years, DEP has somewhat shifted their position on converting septic systems to Town Sewer. Years ago DEP felt that connecting to sewers was best for the environment, but in recent years the idea that properly functioning septic systems help recharge aquifers has become more prevalent at DEP. She discussed septic system replacement and noted that some residents object to the appearance of raised systems or mounds. Ms. Sawyer also mentioned that home additions trigger Title V inspections, which can complicate the project and increase costs. This issue does not apply to homes on town sewer.

Mr. Thibodeau then took questions from the audience.

Resident: When the betterment is being paid over 20 years, what happens if the home is sold during this period?

Mr. Thibodeau: The Purchase and Sales Agreement will address this issue, like all other loans on the property.

Resident: How is the Betterment determined?

Mr. Thibodeau: It has not been determined yet.

Resident: Who makes the decisions on the Betterments?

Mr. Thibodeau: A Town Meeting in the 90's gave the authority to the Board of Selectmen.

Resident: North Cross Road and some other streets have dry sewer. Will those properties be assessed betterments?

Mr. Thibodeau: Those home owners can apply for Betterment Abatement.

Resident: What is the Septic System Failure Rate on Rea Street?

Ms. Sawyer: Five homes have had replacement.

Resident: Is sewer connection mandatory? Can a septic system be inspected without the report going to the Board of Health?

Ms. Sawyer: Board of Health is considering changing the mandatory sewer connection requirement, which is within 6 months from when the sewer becomes active. A septic system can be inspected without the report going to the Board of Health. It is called a voluntary inspection.

Resident: I live at 471 Johnson St and connected to sewer with my own pump system. Will I get assessed?

Mr. Thibodeau: No.

Resident: The construction costs presented earlier were estimates. What if the actual costs become much greater than anticipated, will this result in larger betterments?

Mr. Thibodeau: Selectmen may decide on a flat rate for betterments.

Resident: If the cost of sewer is nearly the same or more than the average septic system replacement, I do not see the benefit to sewer installation and will take my chances with maintaining my septic system.

Mr. Thibodeau: I understand, that is a good point.

Resident: Since we do not *have* to do this, I do not see the benefit. These costs are very high and this is a tough economic time. I want Selectmen to understand my concerns.

Mr. Thibodeau: That's what this meeting is all about.

Resident: Massachusetts has a tax credit if you connect to sewer. Are there any financial programs to help home owners connect?

Mr. Thibodeau: The Town does not have a financial program, we will check to see if the State has any.

Resident: Are the sewers designed yet?

Mr. Thibodeau: No.

Resident: I live on South Cross Road. We have dry Sewer. Can we connect to the Molly Towne Road sewer off Summer Street?

Mr. Willett: The sewer in South Cross Road was built with a certain slope and depth. I do not think it can be connected to the Molly Towne Road sewer due to elevation.

Resident: Why are we going through this process now?

Mr. Thibodeau: Since sewers in the Lake Cochichewick are done, the question as to where to go next is before us. We have been asked frequently by residents all over town "When are sewers going to be installed in my street?" The CWMP addresses these concerns and includes these Encapsulated Areas.

Resident: Is there State financing available for these projects?

Mr. Thibodeau: If we go forward, we will seek all financial help available, but it may be unlikely because we are not under a Consent Order from DEP.

Resident: The 60% Betterment seems unfair, especially since the Lake was under 20% betterment.

Mr. Thibodeau: I understand, but the percentage has not yet been determined.

Resident: I live at 20 North Cross Road and want sewer.

Mr. Thibodeau: OK.

Resident: This is a BAD economic time to do this.

Mr. Thibodeau: I understand.

Resident: Did you consider low pressure sewers? They could be much cheaper.

Mr. Thibodeau: Gravity sewer systems are the most preferred, a section of Rea Street may be a good candidate for a low pressure system.

Resident: I have worked for the Town of Billerica for many years. I have designed sewers in the winter time and installed them in summer. I know the importance of sewers and will support these projects.

Mr. Thibodeau: Thank you.

Resident: There are too many unknowns here for us to make a decision. We do not know the betterment costs, total costs, costs to connect, etc.

Mr. Thibodeau: I see. We are trying to get feedback from you.

Resident: I live at 432 Salem Street and would like to get sewer.

Mr. Thibodeau: OK.

Mr. Thibodeau then asked the residents to send him e-mails and letters expressing their concerns. He then asked, How many here would like us to go forward now? 35 residents responded. How many are interested, but would rather postpone for now and pursue it later? 5 residents responded. How many do not want us to proceed? 14 residents responded. There were approximately 77 people attending the meeting (It can be assumed that the remainder of residents, about 23, did not vote and are undecided)

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