

WOLCOTT CONSIDERS FIRST PUBLIC WASTEWATER FACILITY *TRIES TO GET AHEAD OF THE GROWTH CURVE*

The Lamoille County Town of Wolcott knew it needed to do something about the Town's lack of public wastewater treatment capacity when it recently considered the potential for growth within its borders.

Peering into the future, Wolcott officials were faced with the "reality of exponential growth and development," said selectboard member Fred Martin. "It is not a problem now," added Wolcott town clerk/treasurer Linda Martin (no relation to Fred Martin), "but we foresee a problem in the future." Wolcott determined that its citizens' existing, private, on-site wastewater systems could not handle the increased burdens of development, and began to plan ahead for public alternatives.

Members of the Wolcott selectboard had many concerns when they began discussing the Town's existing wastewater systems. Mr. Martin remarked on the difficulties for existing residential wastewater systems to accommodate a shift to heavier commercial use. Also, new subdivision development could impact existing, on-site systems. A solution considered by the selectboard was an off-site cluster wastewater system, also called a community leach field. The leach field would be less radical than a wastewater treatment plant, yet serve the community well. User fees would need to be collected, but the cost would be kept to a minimum, while placing the wastewater system off-site would eliminate the individual homeowner's expensive burden of fixing on-site systems when problems arose. With the removal of on-site sewage systems, the homeowner's land would become more valuable and increase resale value.

Wanting to know more about all of its options, the selectboard applied for and received a \$20,000 Engineering Planning Advance grant from the Agency of Natural Resources to conduct a wastewater feasibility study in Wolcott Village and North Wolcott Village. The feasibility study is to "stay ahead of the curveball," said Mr. Martin. The study's purpose is to determine if a real problem exists, the depth of the problem, and outline potential alternatives and solutions.

After sending out a Request For Proposal to conduct the study, Stone Environmental Inc. (Stone) received the bid and began work. Stone, based in Montpelier, provides "environmental scientists that do planning, outreach, data management, and needs analysis," according to Project Scientist Mary Clark. Stone conducted a public meeting and designed handouts on the basics of design and maintenance of systems, and their environmental impacts. A survey questionnaire was distributed to property owners in the study area to gather individual property information important to the study. Stone subcontracted the construction design to the engineering firm of Forcier Aldrich & Associates of Essex Junction. Results of the study show that "there is a significant need for a new wastewater system, and there are soil capabilities in both locations (Wolcott Village and North Wolcott Village) to support off-site cluster wastewater systems," said Mr. Martin. Mr. Martin is "extremely pleased with the results of the study and the professionalism of the two firms working on the project."

Mr. Martin noted the Village's planning and zoning department has also benefited from the study. The zoning administrator has used the results of a community survey and the feasibility study as a tool to map out future growth, and the potential of the land around Wolcott Village and North Wolcott Village.

The citizens of Wolcott will determine the next step at a public hearing. "People are scared," said Mr. Martin, but he sees that any objection can be solved through education. The public hearing will cover many items that should address citizens' concerns, including an overview of existing problems and environmental needs, and six wastewater alternatives from which the public will determine how to proceed. There will be discussion on the screening process and potential user costs, followed by discussion on potential funding needs and sources. It is a challenging and exciting time for Wolcott as it plans for the future.

- Tara Fischer, Research and Information Assistant, VLCT Municipal Assistance Center
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