

Lewisboro Sewer Information Meeting, October 8, 2024 - Summary of meeting questions and answers

Why a sewer?

Q. Our lakes and wells are polluted by many things, runoff, fertilizer, goose poop. Why are we working on a sewer?

A. Yes, many pollutants can impact lakes and drinking water. Phosphorus is the pollutant of concern. Studies have shown that septic systems in our lake communities can contribute a sizable amount of pollution to both groundwater aquifers and lakes. Our septic systems are limited by their age, steep slopes, poor soils, proximity to a lake or wetland, and depth to groundwater or bedrock. Pollution from poorly functioning systems can worsen as increasing precipitation events occur. We should continue to focus on reducing other sources of pollution in addition to the sewer, but the sewer is an important step to protect our aquifers, wetlands, and water resources.

Q. Why not just use the money to replace all septic systems?

A. The funds are provided only for replacing septic systems with sewers, which is seen as a longer term and more effective solution than replacing septic systems. Lake Kitchawan will have a septic replacement and maintenance district because a sewer is too expensive to build in that area.

Sewer Plant Questions:

Q. Where will the sewer treatment plant be, and what will it look like?

A. It will be on town-owned property by the current town recycling center. It could look like a home or barn.

Q. Will the sewer treatment plant be noisy, will it smell, will it be lit up 24 hours a day?

A. The treatment will all be inside a building, which will be designed to contain odors and noise. The Oakridge and Wild Oaks plants are run by the town and have all the operations inside the building. Also see private plants like those on Michelle Estates or the small plant at the former Lewisboro Elementary School. Lighting would be minimized but allow safe nighttime access. The backup generator would be outside and would cause some noise when running or exercising.

Q. What if there's a big storm, could chemicals or materials in the plant run down to Truesdale Lake?

A. The plant would be designed with containment systems. All chemicals and processing would take place under cover inside a plant building.

Q. What is the quality of effluent from the plant? Could you drink it?

A. The effluent will be highly treated but not to drinking water standards. It will receive secondary treatment, microbial action, sand filtration, and UV disinfection.

Q. Where will the plant effluent go?

A. The effluent would be discharged to the tributary to the Waccabuc River below the Truesdale Lake outfall.

Q. Can the sewer plant be sized for future expansion?

A. The plant can be designed to make future expansion easier, but the plant will be built to handle current use.

Q. Will all approvals be obtained before the vote on the district?

A. No. Some approvals require the establishment of a district. Some approvals require full plant design. The project will be subject to SEQR review. The project will be discussed in detail with approving agencies as far in advance as feasible.

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Q. Why were these parcels chosen, and why weren't others chosen?

A. The design balances minimizing the cost (length) of the sewer main and maximizing the number of homes served by choosing homes that are close together.

Money!

Q. What if the Town doesn't get grants? Will they have to borrow money and then what is the cost of the loan?

A. The project will not go forward unless the capital costs are covered by grants. A loan is not under consideration.

Q. Is \$1450 the average cost per home? Will a house that is worth more pay more?

A. The details will be available when the Map, Plan, and Report is released. Some sewer districts charge partially based on water volume or a proxy for water use such as bedroom count.

Q. Will there be extra cost for maintaining the sewer system and replacing components that wear out and age?

A. The \$1450 annual estimate will cover both ongoing operations and future maintenance of the system.

Q. Can the annual sewer cost increase over time?

A. Yes, it can. This will be managed by the town, and subject to town review and notice, not a private profit-making company. Others noted that the cost of pumping and replacing your septic system has increased over time.

Q. What about houses below the level of the road, will the connection from the house run across other property and who will pay for that?

A. Connections are made from the home to the road on their own property. Each house will have a grinder pump that will move the household waste to the sewer main.

Q. What will be the cost to hookup and decommission my septic system?

A. An estimate will be available in the Map, Plan, and Report. The project will pay for the cost of the lateral from the main to the grinder pump, which in most cases will be close to the septic tank. The homeowner will pay for hookup from the house to the grinder pump. The septic tank is decommissioned by filling with sand, and septic fields are left in place.

Q. What will be the increase in my home value from being on the system? Will my assessment increase?

A. Sewers are considered to increase home values but it's hard to say how much. It could also be an intangible benefit. If no other changes are made to your home, in the past house assessments have not changed when a sewer is added.

Electrical outages

Q. What if the power goes out?

A. The system will be designed with extra capacity to deal with power outages. The plant will have a backup generator and individual pumps will have a generator connection point. For homes without a backup generator, systems operators would use portable generators to power the grinder pumps and street pumps in the event of a lengthy outage. We don't know of existing battery backup systems for grinder pumps.

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Community impact questions.

Q. Will a sewer system enable unconstrained building and change the character of the community?

A. Normal zoning and building codes apply. The DEP limits building to 80% of the capacity of the sewer plant. The formation of the district includes a sewer law that will apply just to the district, which could, if the community wanted, impose additional restrictions. This will be known before the vote. bNote that today houses can be limited by the number of bedrooms but still be quite large.

Q. Will the sewer harm tree roots, recognizing that harming trees would harm the runoff and water quality?

A. The sewer main will go along the road, so that shouldn't be a big factor. The lateral from the main in the street to the grinder pump near the septic tank would be laid out by house: some impact could occur.

Q. Will wildlife be impacted by a sewer running under the streets?

A. Construction could bother wildlife. We know of no studies showing an impact from underground sewer pipes.

Q. Will the pumps along the mains be noisy?

A. It is very difficult to hear the underground pumps even when you are standing directly above them.

Q. My community has water system pipes, and a 10 foot separation distance is required. How will this be handled?

A. When designing the system, all available information will be used to try to assess locations of all utilities. Tools like ground penetrating radar are available. Risks will be managed as well as possible, and any damage will be repaired.

Q. Could we get additional money to address the drinking water issue?

A. Drinking water grants are available, and would require district formation and partnership with the town.

Q. This will benefit everyone around the lakes, and everyone who drinks the water. Can they share the costs?

A. The laws on district formation do not allow this. The sewer users must pay for the operations and maintenance.

Q. If we use state and county money for the sewer capital costs, do we have to open our lakes to the public?

A. No.

Reference documents

Presentation slides from October 8, 2024 sewer information meeting (https://threelakescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/CleanWOTRPresentation2024_10_08-1.pdf).

YouTube of October 8, 2024 sewer information meeting: (link when posted)

Town-wide lake management plan (2009) <https://threelakescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/TownofLewisboroLakeMngtFINALFeb62009.pdf>

Truesdale Lake Septic Study Engineering Report (2021) <https://www.lewisborony.gov/media/25421>

Lake Waccabuc Septic Study Engineering Report (2021) <https://www.lewisborony.gov/media/25431>

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W&C proposed Sewer and Septic Plan memo (2023) <https://www.lewisborony.gov/media/25406>