

RECORD REVIEW

November, 2003

‘It is moving forward as glacial as it seems.’
— Westchester County Legislator Ursula LaMotte’

‘I think if we had the results by this time next year we would be fortunate.’
— Bedford supervisor Lee Roberts

Officials say: Don’t bring your waste water to Bedford!

By ABBY LUBY

For years Westchester County has been trying to figure out how to keep treated waste from polluting the drinking water supply for nine million people in Westchester and New York City. The original plan for diverting sewage from Yorktown and New Castle was called back to the drawing board earlier this month. In a new effort to consider more options to sewage diversion, the county has authorized funding for a feasibility study known as the Wastewater Treatment Alternatives Comparative Analysis.

Bedford, which already has a plan in place, was scheduled to start diverting sewage to the Bedford Correctional Facility, but only after Yorktown and New Castle had completed their plan, known as “phase one” of the project. The county is now in the process of selecting a special task force of 19 people who will be the Citizens Advisory Council on Sewage Treatment. The committee’s charge is to advise and make recommendations to the legislators based on the final analysis.

Bedford’s supervisor Lee Roberts thinks the process may take longer than expected. “The problem with the study is that before they even begin, they have to get input from everyone on what will be included in the RFP (request for proposal) and that all takes time,” said Mrs. Roberts. “They will have to hear back from everyone, review everything and come up with a package to put out. Then they’ll have to allow the bidders the time to look over the specs. It will be at least May before it is even awarded to anyone. I think if we had the results by this time next year we would be fortunate.”

County water master Gina D’Agrosa says that there are built-in time lines for each part of the study. “I do know that the legislation on the comparative analysis study has some time frames in it,” said Ms. D’Agrosa.

She said with the initial proposal will be drafted to hire a consultant to prepare that study, which would be prepared within 60 days. This resolution was passed Nov. 10 and within 60 days from Nov. 10, the draft RFP should be available for review by the board of legislators, the citizens committee and other concerned parties. like the Northern Westchester Watershed committee. “Sixty days after that, the RFP will go out, a consultant will be selected and the study will be completed in six months after someone is hired,” said Ms. D’Agrosa.

After a consultant is hired by the county to review all the alternatives or any combinations of diversion technologies, the county will start the actual environmental review process.

“Nothing is speedy with the county,” said Mrs. Roberts. “I think, realistically, the study will not be concluded for at least a year. That would be optimistic.”

Sewage diversion has been a contentious and divisive issue, whether concerning the ecological, social, economic or political aspects. The cities of Peekskill and Yonkers have lashed out at the county, claiming that environmental racism is driving the county to divert waste to poorer, minority towns. The original plan was to route 1.7 million gallons of sewage per day from Yorktown to the Peekskill plant and about 420,000 gallons of waste from New Castle to Yonkers.

The comparative analysis is slated to examine several alternatives. One is upgrading the Hallocks Mill waste water treatment plant in Yorktown and looking at state-of-the-art septic system technologies to upgrade failing septic systems in the Hallocks Mill Sanitary Sewer District.

The study will also look at diverting sanitary sewage effluent from the Hallocks Mill to the county-owned Peekskill waste water treatment plant for secondary waste water treatment by expanding the Hallocks mill treatment plant. The part of the study that may directly impact the Town of Bedford will consider diverting sanitary sewage effluent from the privately-owned Riverwoods and Random Farms waste water treatment plants in the Town of New Castle to the New York State-owned Bedford Correctional facility waste water treatment plant. It will also look at diverting New Castle’s waste to the county-owned Yonkers Joint Waste Water treatment plant for secondary waste water treatment. If the New Castle-to-Bedford Correctional is preferred, it could tap out the capacity for Bedford. Ursula LaMotte (R-Katonah) is not crazy about the idea.

“I objected strenuously to putting the New Castle issue in the study because it’s very expensive,” said Mrs. LaMotte. “There are much easier ways to divert New Castle sewage than to bring it over to Bedford. I’ve been assured by some colleagues that it was put in the study because everything had to be put in, whether it was feasible or not. I’m hoping that’s correct.”

In the initial plan New Castle would be sending 160,000 gallons of raw sewage to Yonkers., A revision to the plan later changed it to 420,000 gallons, after it was determined that the daily amount for New Castle was originally underestimated.

Mrs. LaMotte still supports the original diversion plan for New Castle. “It’s still possible for New Castle to divert to Yonkers,” she said. “It’s not a great amount and considering the size of the Yonkers plant, it’s the proverbial drop in the bucket,” she said. “So that to me makes a great deal more sense and we need to again fix the problems at the sewage treatment plants so there is not so much opposition to them, the odor problems mainly.” Agreeing with Mrs. LaMotte is Mrs. Roberts. “I don’t think that idea is feasible,” she said. “It’s not viable and it’s very expensive. I don’t think New Castle is in favor of the idea as well. We’ve spoken about it at the watershed committee meetings and since it was put on the table, Mr. Kaplowitz has explained that every option is going to be examined and that’s one of them.”

Setting up the advisory committee is currently being addressed by county legislators. As part of the new legislation for funding the comparative analysis project, a committee of 19 are being chosen by the legislators. Initially there will be 15 members with two serving as co-chairs. Yonkers, Peekskill, Yorktown and New Castle will each have two representatives while Bedford, Cortlandt and Somers will have one representative. There will be one representative for a homeowner parcel and one from the environmental justice community. The initial 15 members will choose additional members to serve on the

council and will have to report to members of the Legislation, Environment & Health, Public Works, Cultural & Ethnic Diversity and Budget & Appropriations committees. “The legislators are still deciding on who they are going to appoint to the advisory council,” said Tara Bernard, legislative aide to Michael Kaplowitz and aide to the legislature’s committee on environment and health. “They are looking for people knowledgeable in some sort of area about this project and who are willing to commit the time it’s going to take.”

“It is moving forward as glacial as it seems,” said Mrs. LaMotte “Many of my colleagues are putting pressure on the committee that’s being set up to move expeditiously. A large mistake was made in not bringing all the communities together at the very beginning years ago, and now we’re paying for that. The money is there and is growing. It’s just a matter of trying to put these projects together in a timely way.”

“The citizens advisory committee will be advising the legislature on various topics,” said Mrs. Roberts. “I’m not sure, but that may muddy the waters further.”