

# Town of Lewiston approves backflow preventer grant program; reimbursements up to \$2,000 available

Donna Garfinkel announces retirement

BY TERRY DUFFY

Editor-in-Chief

The Town of Lewiston responded Monday to a host of inflow and infiltration concerns raised over past months by homeowners in the town's northern end. All have contended with flooding issues following two significant wet weather events earlier this year.

Several homeowners, particularly those in the Morgan Farms, Oakhill/North Fifth Street, Hillside Drive, Lewistowne Park and adjoining neighborhoods, spoke of flooding, drainage and sewer backups, and aggravated inflow and infiltration conditions at their residences following a 5-inch rainfall on June 18. It marked the second such wet weather event in 2024 that town officials now attribute to climate change. A similar event occurred Jan. 26 when heavy rains combined with snow melts produced similar woes.

Following the June rains, several property owners organized to form the Neighborhood Association for Sewer Trouble Eradication (NASTE). Many vented their concerns to Town Board members at the board's July and August regular meetings. Town officials responded with pledges for action – one being the possibility of backflow preventer units installed on the lateral sewer lines leading to their affected properties.

At the work session, Supervisor Steve Broderick provided updates to the grant program Lewiston has been considering. Under the plan, individual homeowners who qualify would be assisted with the purchase and installation cost of the backflow preventer units. The cost has been estimated to be in the thousands of dollars.

Broderick went on to share information provided by Jeff Ritter, administrator of Lewiston's Water Pollution Control Center, who was absent from the session.

"We have been working on a backflow preventer grant program," he said. "As Jeff Ritter explained at the last meeting, this is not a grant that the town is seeking. This is a grant that the town is going to provide its residents, if you qualify."

Broderick presented a motion seeking Town Board approval.

## \$2,000 funding assistance

The grant would provide a maximum reimbursement of \$2,000 for affected property owners in the flood-prone areas "where we have known flooding," Broderick said the town estimated the program's cost to be in the area of \$100,000. It would provide funding assistance to roughly 50 homes. "It didn't set that number (as the limit) because we just don't know. We know the neighborhoods are flooding."

"Ballpark, it's around \$100,000. If it's more than that we'll revisit it," Broderick said.

He noted the estimated \$2,000 cost to individual properties would cover installation of the backflow preventer by a licensed contractor who is registered to work in Lewiston. "It will have to be inspected and the money will not be paid out (to homeowners) until the job is inspected."

Following some board discussion, the program was unani-

mously approved. Funding will come from the town's H-97 infrastructure account. Interested residents are advised to contact Ritter via the WPCC at 716-754-8291 for more information.

In a related area, Broderick proposed Town Engineer Bob Lannon, principal/vice president of GHD Consulting, to conduct drainage studies in the Oak Hill and Hillside Drive area.

"GHD is going to take the old engineering that was part of the subdivision back in the '80s," he said. "They are going to reconfigure it (for updating.)"

Broderick said the cost would be \$32,000, with funding drawn from the town's fund balance accounts. The motion passed unanimously. Later on in the session, Broderick presented numerous responses by Ritter to a series of questions posed by the NASTE group.

## Town responds to homeowners

"I wanted to read these responses from Jeff Ritter for the record," Broderick said.

He noted:

- Discharges of raw sewage in lower Niagara River. According to Ritter: "The town has three DEC-permitted outfalls on our state pollution discharge elimination system (SPDES) permits. In times of wet weather events, the treatment plant will bypass flow to our ORF, or overflow retention facility. This year, we (had) two wet weather events, Jan. 26 and June 18."

- What has GHD Consulting done thus far? Have they looked into problem, found a solution? Ritter responded, "Town engineers are always involved in the treatment plant." He said that information is available to residents.

- What of the town's schedule for maintenance of drainage and sewer pipes. Ritter responded, "Each year, the town's Water Pollution Control Center is mandated by (DEC) to produce a capacity-monitoring and maintenance report showing the work and collection system."

He said GHD reports typically include such areas as sewer pipe cleaning and camera inspections of the lines.

- Any plans to replace sewer lines at this time? "No," Ritter said. "We've located some piping that may be lined, but nothing to be replaced."

- Is I&I funding received for each new development? "We've received money for the I&I plan for each new development," Ritter said. "And we've had a lot. Much has been received in the past five years, and what it has been used for."

- Is there a record of this for public review? Ritter's response: "We do not have a lot of money for redevelopments to perform miracles in the collection system. What we have from those particular funds are able to be spent on private properties, because they don't come from tax or user fees."

"Most inflow and infiltration problems in the sewer system are from private property," Ritter said. "Town forces do not work on private property. This money would be for A-clamp installations on private property."

## WPCC upgrades

- On a question of what has the town done to improve the WPCC over the past five years, Ritter offered numerous examples. His comments included: "The \$1.3 million electrical work to the plant upgraded our failing antique electrical distribution system within the plant and added generators to the main pump station and remote pump stations. We put in a new sludge handling process; new air blower for the activated sludge process; brought our main panel supervisory control and data acquisition system into existence, including bar screen monitoring, new bore diversion valve controls, sludge handling alarms, wet well indicators, mixed tank totalizers, waste and rate totalizers, dissolved oxygen sensors, airflow monitors (and) explosive gas alarms."

"(Also), digestive compressors, level indicator alarms; forced main totalizer; OREM totalizer, tank fluid totalizers, tank alarms, (numerous) monitoring alarms, three reload sludge pumps (and) new tank catwalks and wires."

"Main plant pump replacement, repair of the main plant fundamentals. For the collection system, we have concentrated on sealing the most egregious infiltration points; manhole lining (done each year throughout the collection system); and inflow inverters under the lids."

He said the town also purchased "a long-overdue vacuum truck, new pipe camera kit for sewer in-

spection of the lines."

- Regarding the location of the town's pump stations, Ritter said they include: "Village of Lewiston on Water Street across from The Silo Restaurant; Joe Davis pump station on River Road; Creek Road pump station across from Lewiston-Porter; Old Lewiston Road across from Riverdale Cemetery north of the Power Authority; College Heights pumps station, located on Hyde Park and University Drive across from Niagara University; Swann Road pump station in front of National Grid property; Porter, Swain Road pump station located at end of Swain Road; and Lakeshore No. 1 and 2, outside Youngstown."

- Regarding the town's plans for temporary storage in high-flow events, Ritter commented, "Excess water is diverted to the overflow retention facilities, ORF. Two 1-million-gallon tanks that act as primary clarifiers and get chlorinated before mixing with tank flows."

He said the town's DEC SPDES permit has not been renewed since 2017.

- On a question of what operational and equipment changes will be made to WPCC, he replied, "None. This plant is held as an example by the DEC as to what a properly run plant should be."

- On a question of the town considering a reimbursement plan for affected homeowners, he replied, "No. After a certain amount of waterfalls (in wet weather events), it is up to the homeowner to pro-

tect themselves, especially if it a chronically happening event."

Broderick closed by stating, "I wanted to put that on the record, and I will be supplying those answers along with any documents to the homeowners."

## Garfinkel announces retirement

In other news from the session:

- Town Clerk/Tax Collector Donna R. Garfinkel announced her retirement, effective Oct. 4. The board accepted her announcement "with regret" and approved for Deputy Town Clerk Tamra Burns to serve as acting town clerk.

- Broderick proposed Local Law No. 4. The measure calls for termination of the Lewiston Environmental Commission, to be replaced by the Environmental Planning Review Board. The town announced a public hearing to consider the plan would take place at the board's regular meeting, at 6 p.m. Monday Sept. 23.

- The Town Board approved \$5,000 in emergency funding to assist the Sanborn Pekin Library, which is addressing a combined \$58,200 repair job to its roof and ventilation systems. Broderick called the request an emergency situation and said funding would come from the town's "A" balance account.

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