

## REQUEST FOR RELIEF FOR THE VASSALBORO SANITARY DISTRICT

The Vassalboro Sanitary District, a quasi-municipal entity, was created in the 1970's to provide a public wastewater collection and treatment system to improve water quality in China Lake and Outlet Stream. The areas of North and East Vassalboro provided housing and labor for the woolen mill and sawmill in the towns. Homes were built on small, concentrated lots of land. Over time, private systems of sewer discharged untreated sewage to the local waterbodies. The private owners of these sewers were required by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to provide acceptable treatment. With rigid enforcement of environmental laws required after the passage of the Clean Water Act, the sewer system was constructed due to most homes unable to dispose of wastewater in a conventional septic tank and subsurface bed due to the small lot sizes and poorly drained clay soil. Because the Town of Vassalboro did not own the sewer system, the town was shielded from enforcement action.

Several engineering studies were conducted during the 1960's and 1970's to solve the wastewater disposal issues. The general recommendation was to collect the wastewater and pump it to Winslow for treatment at the new Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District plant in Waterville. During the late 70's and 80's federal and state grants were made available to communities which covered 90% of the construction costs for wastewater treatment facilities. Vassalboro qualified for federal and state grant assistance during this time. During the late 1970's and early 1980's, the use of "alternative" technologies was encouraged and was funded at up to 100% grant funding. The Sanitary District eventually chose to construct an alternative system to maximize the project funding. This consisted of localized sewer systems and sand filtration beds with discharge to the Outlet Stream which connects China Lake to the Kennebec River. The sand filter beds did not perform as expected after construction, but the district was able to receive funding to correct the operational problems. However, the solution was to construct open sand filter beds which pumped partially treated sewage onto the ground surface to infiltrate through the sand filter beds. This met the treatment requirements but resulted in nuisance conditions due to the sewage on the ground surface in the middle of town.

After 30 years of use, the original wastewater treatment system was worn out and obsolete. In addition, the Maine DEP imposed more stringent treatment requirements which the older technology could not meet. The district was threatened with enforcement action if the system was not improved. In 2015, the district decided to upgrade the system by abandoning the old sand filter beds and connecting to the Winslow system. Had the district done this originally the cost of upgrading the system would have been far less than the nearly \$9 million the new system eventually cost. The district was able to receive a significant amount of federal, state, and local funding for the project, but was still forced to borrow over \$3 million to finance the project. Due to only a small number of users paying, the projected user fee was higher than the maximum that the Maine DEP considered to be an expensive project. The DEP guidelines allowed additional funding to be made available to the district. The district requested additional funding of \$2,722,000 to help reduce the user fees and help keep costs affordable. Due to the number of other requests for grant funding, DEP awarded a grant of \$600,000.

During project design and construction, the Town of Vassalboro helped facilitate:

1. TIF grants of \$290,000 to be used toward the capital costs of the project.
2. The Town of Vassalboro applied for and received a Community Development Block Grant for \$997,340 which was used toward the capital costs of the project.

Operational costs consist of paying the Town of Winslow a contract quarterly base fee of \$1,212.19 plus customer rate of water usage, operation of the collection and pumping system within the Town of Vassalboro, and office personnel. Since the system began operation in 2018, operational costs have more than doubled and resulted in user costs which are the highest in the State of Maine. The village areas of North and East Vassalboro are some of the lowest income areas in town, and the resultant user charges of more than \$2000 per year for a user are not sustainable.

The district is requesting relief to the project debt which consists of a federal loan of \$2,113,000 and state loan of 1,445,775. Assistance with this debt will help reduce the user fees to a more sustainable level.

Past and Future Pricing:

Current Pricing:

Line Fee:	\$150.00/qtr
Water Usage:	\$ 0.14/ cf
Building Drainage Fee:	\$ 25.00/qtr
Ready-To-Serve Fee:	\$ 50.00/qtr

Price Increase effective April 2025

Line Fee:	\$195.00/qtr
Water Usage:	\$ 0.17/ cf
Building Drainage Fee:	\$ 50.00/qtr
Ready-To-Serve Fee:	\$ 75.00/qtr