

Good afternoon, my name is Megan McDonough, and I am here in support of LD832

In 2015 our local sewer system was "failing". Facing the threat of fines, the VSD board, elected to install a new system to comply regulations. Media reported, this new system would address the environmental issue and cut consumer costs. In a Morning Sentinel article dated March of 2015, Norton True of Hoyle, Tanner and (who worked on the project) was quoted as saying "I promise you, this won't be built unless it can be affordable".

As a homeowner and member of the community, cleaner water and a decrease in my sewer bill felt like a no brainer.

Ultimately, this promise was not honored and the system in place is not affordable as it was presented. This has resulted in a dire situation impacting economic and housing stability within my community.

Vassalboro is considered a "low income community" I believe if you look at the AMI of those 200 families impacted you will determine an even lower AMI than the county average. 10 years ago you'd run into your neighbors at one of our local stores, today with no stores left, you run into neighbors at the food pantry.

Residents on the system currently pay double the state and national average of \$65 per month for sewer. With this 60% increase we will be paying 300% more than the state and national average per month. My current annual sewer bill alone is \$1600 per year, it will be increasing to roughly \$2600 per year. That is more than my taxes.

As I stand here today, 50 of the 200 families on the VSD system already have sewer liens in place on their home for past due bills with a 60% increase still coming.

A lien destroys a person's credit and borrowing capacity. This will have devastating impacts that ripple through every aspect of a family's daily life. Need to replace the car you drive to get to work, that sewer lien has decreased your credit rating and you may no longer be able to borrow money for the transportation needed support your family. These consequences often result in housing and community instability.

If folks are unable to pay these sewer bills the VSD is still unable to pay operational and loan obligations, what comes next?

Facing an annual sewer bill of \$2600, I may be forced to sell my home. Will anyone pay fair market value knowing they will be saddled with this unreasonable expense? My neighbor, Jonathan McCaslin sold his home late last year and has moved to Windsor. Jon intentionally sold before the increase.

A small group of concerned citizens went door to door speaking with people, the stories were heartbreaking. Members of our community are not paying other bills timely when the

sewer bill comes due, not buying medications, limiting bathing, limiting doing laundry, limiting flushing the toilet, NOT BUYING FOOD, this was heard over and over from impacted members of our community, all to stay in our homes.

RCAP, an independent 3rd party conducted a study of the issue and determined that the VSD sewer rate is “unaffordable” when using the EPA’s Affordability Assessment Tool.

This project was presented to the community as an affordable, necessary environmental betterment for the community at large. All we are asking is to pay a reasonable rate, not be liened, not lose our homes.

We are here today because we have tried everything within our power. We’ve gone to the PUC, the Governor’s Office, Office of the Attorney General, Office of Public Advocacy. We filed an 801 motion to challenge the reasonableness of the rate in Superior Court – unfortunately, as a community that lacks the ability to pay the sewer bill we are not a community that could afford to retain counsel, we could not get to Superior Court to be heard.

I, and members of our Community, come before you today with a request made out of desperation. You are our last hope, our last option. When you leave here today, you may forget our faces and the issue facing our small community but please know, the decision you make will not be forgotten, the impact – positive or negative will be felt in each and every one of our 200 homes, in many ways, for many years to come.

RCAP Solutions

March 3, 2024

Vassalboro Sanitary District
Board of Trustees
PO Box 183
N. Vassalboro, Maine 04989

Dear Trustees,

This letter follows up on our conversations regarding the funding received and repayment concerns for the Vassalboro Sanitary District (District). At the meeting in November 2023, it was evident that there were concerns among the community on how to pay for the operations, maintenance, and debt obligations. To the benefit of the community as a whole, the District was successful in receiving money from local, state, and federal funding sources for the project, including:

Source	Description	Loans	Grant	Total
USDA	United States Rural Development	\$2,113,000	\$1,700,000	\$3,813,000
CWSRF	Clean Water State Revolving Fund	\$1,049,000	\$1,041,000	\$2,090,000
DEP	Department of Environmental Protection	\$0	\$600,000	\$600,000
CDBG	Community Development Block Grant	\$0	\$997,340	\$997,340
Town TIF	Municipal Tax Increment Financing	\$0	\$290,000	\$290,000
Totals		\$3,162,000	\$4,628,340	\$7,790,340

Even with the funding provided by these entities, the resulting loans will significantly impact the District's customer base, which is comprised of 200 customers. One prudent option would be to consider the shared human and ecological benefits this project will provide to the community – not just the District customers - and how the financial impact could best be shared among all community residents.

The community places a high value on protecting the environment, as evidenced by the efforts to restore the Alewives with municipal tax increment financing (TIF). In considering the most appropriate way to address the District's financial situation, the public needs to understand some basic concepts surrounding wastewater, the difference between primary and secondary wastewater treatment, and the benefits of the District's wastewater upgrades on the community.

Wastewater

Wastewater, or water that has been used can be domestic, commercial, or industrial. Domestic wastewater can carry chemicals, germs from homes, and urine and feces. Commercial and industrial wastewater can have even more harmful impacts on the environment, depending on the kind of facility. This waste stream can carry soluble and insoluble contents that impact acid and base levels and fats, oils, and grease from restaurants and commercial businesses. When insufficiently treated byproducts have the opportunity to

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flow directly or indirectly into rivers, lakes, streams, and soils, they damage the environment in numerous ways. Its effects on flora, fauna, terranean, and subterranean creatures can be detrimental.

The current definition of effluent is waste that pours into or flows into our water. As is widely understood, wastewater effluent can pose many hazards for humans, animals, and the environment. It can be toxic, corrosive, reactive, acidic, and ignitable. **Wastewater pollutant loads can include paint, solvents, oils, herbicides, pesticides, human waste, food waste, fats, oils and grease, pharmaceuticals, and many other products.** Therefore, effluent must undergo treatment before being reused or redirected into the ecosystem.

Wastewater carries pollutant loads that are harmful to the environment. Most states require secondary wastewater treatment, defined as removing biodegradable organic matter from sewage or similar kinds of wastewater. The goal is to achieve a high degree of effluent quality in a sewage treatment system suitable for the intended disposal or reuse options. **The sand filters previously used only provided primary treatment, and the existing sewer system did not comply with phosphorous limits.** Secondary, or tertiary, treatment is a method of treatment that consists of eliminating non-biodegradable pollutants. Since sand filters do not offer secondary treatment, continued use of the filters would have harmed the public and the environment. The most viable option was to pump the effluent to the neighboring Town, where secondary treatment could be provided, instead of continued use of the sand filters.

Environmental and Ecological Impacts

Wastewater contaminates soil, and after rainfall, the soil runs into connecting waterways or seeps into aquifers. The attached figure notes that the sand filters are very close to the aquifer. Protecting our waterways and our aquifers is essential for everybody in the community. The work the community took for the Alewife species is evidence of this. Two fish ladders were constructed in the north section of Town. One built near the North Main Street Treatment Plant and the second near the Cemetery Treatment Plant. The construction of the fish ladders and the use of TIF funds to provide for them make it clear that the community is interested in protecting the environment. The project to abandon the treatment facilities will continue to have significant positive impacts on the community and its natural resources for many years.

Excessive nutrient levels in wastewater, particularly nitrogen and phosphorus, contribute to eutrophication. When these nutrients enter water bodies, they stimulate the rapid growth of algae and aquatic plant life. As these organisms increase, they reduce the water oxygen levels, resulting in the death of fish and other aquatic species. This can interfere with the natural balance of the ecosystems, having severe ecological repercussions and causing the formation of "dead zones" where no marine life can survive. A map showing the ecological impact is attached.

Wildlife in and around water bodies can suffer significantly, as they are susceptible to problems from negative impacts on the water. The impacts on fish, amphibians, and invertebrates will disrupt the food chains and loss of habitat due to water pollution, and this can lead to a decline in wildlife species, disrupting the ecosystem dynamics. In addition, many biodegradable substances from the wastewater effluent may enter the water. Organisms will start breaking them down, using up considerable amounts of

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dissolved oxygen. Critical for marine life to survive, the dissolved oxygen can become depleted, which is life-threatening to aquatic species. The oils and grease in effluent are much harder to break down. They can settle on the water's surface, which blocks the light needed by photosynthesis for aquatic plants, which suffocates fish and affects birds' ability to fly. In addition to the project's impact on wildlife, the benefit of the project can be felt by boating enthusiasts, fishermen who enjoy nature and the outdoors, and the general population of Vassalboro. Failing to protect the waterways from the harmful causes of under-treated wastewater can also harm those who consume the fish.

When water flows in the environment, it is always moving. It moves around the Town into the waterways, rivers, streams, by the boat ramp, near the swimming hole and then infiltrates the aquifers. The Kennebec Water District's Water Treatment Plant draws its source water directly from the West Basin of China Lake. Removing the sand filters and pumping the wastewater to Winslow also helps protect public health, as the wastewater isn't being discharged and making its way into China Lake.

Economic Impact

Municipalities with access to adequate wastewater treatment are more likely to attract commercial and industrial businesses. Potential homeowners may like the advantages of connecting to the sewer system; however, if that sewer system has astronomical charges, they're not very likely to buy homes in this area. Furthermore, if the cost of being connected to the sewer rises to such a level, some people will be forced to sell their homes, and potential home buyers may not be interested. The economic impact of high sewer rates on individuals and businesses is a problem for the whole the Town. The industry standard is to consider household income when trying to determine whether wastewater rates are "affordable" in a community. While no two situations and situations are alike, anything above 1.5-2% of the Median Household Income (MHI) for an area is generally considered unaffordable.

Using the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Affordability Assessment Tool and a sample sewer bill from the District, the current rates (at 2.11% of MHI) are considered unaffordable for many in the community. The calculation is shown below:

Quarterly Bill	Annual Bill	Affordability (% of MHI*)
\$374.40	\$1,497.60	2.11

*Vassalboro MHI: \$70,958 (S1901 Income in the Past 12 Months, in 2022 Inflation-Adjusted Dollars). \$1419.16 would be the annual rate at 2% of MHI.

Several communities in New England have chosen to fund wastewater infrastructure from the general tax base. Under this scenario, the loan payment could be split such that half of the loan payment would be paid on the tax base, and the other half would be paid out of the sewer budget, ensuring that the sewer rates are within the affordability criteria set forth by EPA. Two scenarios are shown in the table below.

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Description	Includes all Debt	Includes 1/2 of the Debt
Estimated Number of Tax Bills	2,740.00	2,740.00
Annual Loan Payments (P&I)	120,265.00	60,132.50
Cost Per Tax Bill	\$43.89	\$21.95

The approximately \$22 increase in the tax bill is a small amount to pay for the ecological, environmental, economic, and health benefits that all the Town's residents enjoy. Maps showing Ecological Impacts and Human Impacts are attached.

Laurie A. Stevens

Laurie A. Stevens, P.E.
Regional Director, ME, NH & VT
RCAP Solutions, Inc.

Cc:Arron Miller, Town Manager

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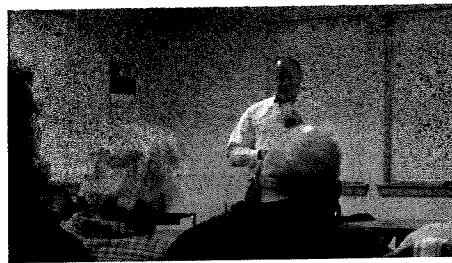
Vassalboro to pursue Winslow sewer connection

cm centralmaine.com/2015/03/23/vassalboro-to-pursue-winslow-sewer-conneciton

March 24, 2015

VASSALBORO — Sanitary District trustees voted unanimously Monday to move forward with plans to replace the sewer's treatment plants with a connection to the Winslow sewer system.

Before the vote trustees the district manager and representatives from an engineering firm that evaluated the system fielded questions from approximately 30 residents and customers at a public hearing on the project at the Vassalboro Town Office.



Engineer Richard Green, from the Hoyle, Tanner and Associates firm in Winthrop answers questions at a public hearing on a proposed sewer connection between Vassalboro and Winslow at the Vassalboro Town Office Monday night. Staff photo by Peter McGuire
Those attending questioned the cost of the project and what effect it would have on their sewer bills. In general, however, most seemed to accept the idea that the district has to replace its treatment systems.

The proposed connection to Winslow would hook Vassalboro into the Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District, in Waterville, and allow the district to dismantle its sand filter treatment sites that are past their useful life and could be at risk of failure.

Two of the sites are in North Vassalboro, including one in the center of town off Main Street, and a third is in East Vassalboro. All three sites discharge wastewater into Outlet Stream.

While the small plants were fine when they were constructed in the early 1980s, they are deteriorating from age and are costly and difficult to maintain, explained Richard Green, an engineer from Hoyle, Tanner and Associates, in a presentation to the gathering.

While the plants do not consistently violate discharge levels allowed under the district's permit, the mechanical equipment is worn out and the sand filters, which are uncovered, are becoming less effective, Green noted.

Moreover, new system will not conform to new discharge rules being considered by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection that will likely be included when its discharge license is renewed.

"There are signs that they systems are on their way to failure," he said.

In an evaluation of six options to replace the systems, the connection to Winslow was the least expensive, when considering the long-term costs of operation, Green added.

Construction of the lines and pumps needed for the new connection is estimated to cost \$5.1 million and the cost to operate the system could be an average of approximately \$172,000 per year, according to Green.

Although other options, like constructing a combined treatment plant in North Vassalboro or building separate sites in North and East Vassalboro might cost the same or less to construct, the overall operational costs are considerably higher, he pointed out.

The firm considered replacing the sand in the filters, but was unable to locate a vendor for the specific type of sand DEP requires to use in the filters, he noted.

With only 193 customers, paying for the project will be unaffordable unless the district receives significant grant funding and other financial aid, noted Norton True, a client representative for Hoyle, Tanner and Associates.

Constructing the new sewer line, which is proposed to connect into Winslow near Millennium Drive, should also bring in new customers to balance out the cost on existing ratepayers, True noted. The district is aiming at connecting another 100 users, including commercial facilities, into the new sewer, he said.

"I promise you, this won't be built unless it can be affordable," True said.

The average user pays between \$480-\$600 per year for sewer service in Vassalboro. Paying for the project could increase the rates to \$600-\$1,000 a year, Green estimated.

Sewer trustees were already working on outside funding from the U.S. Agriculture Department Rural Development program, which could provide between 45 percent and 75 percent of project costs and low interest loans, explained district manager Chuck Applebee. In addition, the trustees were examining other options, like a Community Development Block Grant and funding through a TIF district the town set up around the Summit Natural Gas project.

Applebee noted that there was no silver bullet that would pull funding together for the project.

Selectman Lauchlin Titus said that when the TIF was passed it included an opportunity to fund sewer improvements and would consider how it wanted to use the funds after the first full year of the program.

Sewer Trustee Ray Breton, who the sewer bills for several buildings he owns in North Vassalboro said there was a definite need to keep costs within acceptable limits, but the town's treatment systems have to be replaced.

"We need to put our best foot forward," he said.

Breton, along with trustees Lee Trahan, Alfred Roy and Lysa Lovely plan to meet with Winslow representatives on April 6 to begin negotiations on an interlocal agreement for the sewer connection.

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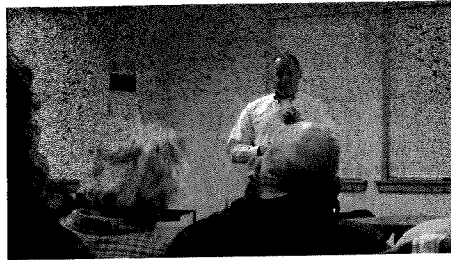
Vassalboro Sanitary District moves forward on funding for new sewer connection

cm centralmaine.com/2016/07/10/vassalboro-sanitary-district-moves-forward-on-funding-for-new-sewer-connection

July 10, 2016

VASSALBORO — The Sanitary District Committee is moving ahead in its plans to connect the town's sewer system with Winslow's and send its waste to the Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District.

The sewer system is more than 30 years old and has "outlived its life," according to Lee Trahan, a committee member. The proposed connection would bring Vassalboro into compliance with Department of Environmental Protection rules on phosphorous.



Engineer Richard Green, of Hoyle, Tanner and Associates in Winthrop, answers questions at a public hearing on the proposed sewer connection between Vassalboro and Winslow in 2015. The sanitary district said this week it's moving ahead on the plans. Staff file photo

Related Headlines

Vassalboro to pursue Winslow sewer connection

The committee decided this was the most cost-efficient way to fix the aging sewer system and voted to approve the project in March 2015.

They are now in the process of gathering as many sources of funding as they can, Trahan said. The total cost of the project is a little more than \$5 million and should take about eight months. Overall, the costs to customers should decrease because Vassalboro won't be running its own treatment plant anymore.

The town has been approved for a \$2.9 million Community Development Block Grant, of which about \$1.4 million is considered principal forgiveness and the rest is a loan. While the sanitary district acts as a quasi-municipal entity and is separate from the town, the town had to apply for the CDBG.

The town is also letting the district use \$145,000 more of tax increment financing money. It had previously received \$60,000 in TIF money, Committee Chairman Ray Breton said.

The State Revolving Loan Fund is releasing \$1 million to the project in the spring of 2017.

The committee is also applying for a Northern Borders Regional Commission grant for a maximum \$250,000, as well as the \$2.5 million in grants and loans from the United States Department of Agriculture.

Breton said the committee estimates that the loans will take about 30 to 40 years to pay off.

The sewer system treats waste in Vassalboro and discharges wastewater at three sites into Outlet Stream: one in North Vassalboro, one on Main Street and one in East Vassalboro. The new system would be better for the environment, Trahan said, because it would cut off discharge. It would also be good for customers, who complain about the water and the smell, he said.

"It's going to be a benefit to all the communities involved," Trahan said.

Under the new system, waste would travel three miles through piping to Winslow and then get treated at the Kennebec Sanitary District, which Trahan said has "more than enough" capacity to handle Vassalboro's approximately 200 customers.

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'Bajirao Mastani' will be pleasant surprise for MIFF filmgoers

Wayne group buys Masonic Hall to convert it into community space

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Vassalboro Sanitary District to get \$3.8 million in federal aid

cm centralmaine.com/2016/11/02/vassalboro-sanitary-district-to-receive-3-8-million-in-federal-assistance

November 2, 2016

centralmaine.com

The Vassalboro Sanitary District will receive \$3.8 million in assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to upgrade its system and make a connection from the town of Winslow to a regional wastewater treatment facility.

The agency announced the funding Wednesday, saying the Vassalboro district would receive a \$2.1 million water and waste disposal direct loan and a \$1.7 million grant.

USDA officials said in a news release that the rural development funding “will be used to make an interconnection with the Town of Winslow for treatment at the Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District’s regional wastewater treatment facility,” as well as “other needed upgrades will be made to the existing wastewater treatment facilities.”

The local project funding was among \$331 million announced nationwide for 85 projects aimed at improving water and wastewater infrastructure in rural areas in 39 states, the release said.

Another Maine project also received funding. The Boothbay Harbor Sewer District will receive \$600,000 for upgrades to the district’s sewer distribution system.

Under the local project, the Vassalboro Sanitary District would connect the town’s sewer system with Winslow’s and send its waste to the Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District. A sanitary district committee decided it’s the most cost-efficient way to fix the aging sewer system and voted to approve the project in March 2015.

The sewer system is more than 30 years old and has “outlived its life,” according to Lee Trahan, a committee member. The proposed connection would bring Vassalboro into compliance with Department of Environmental Protection rules on phosphorous.

The project’s total cost is a little more than \$5 million and should take about eight months. In addition to the USDA funding, the project also will be paid for by a Community Development Block Grant and tax increment financing money.

The sewer system treats waste in Vassalboro and discharges wastewater at three sites into Outlet Stream: one in North Vassalboro, one on Main Street and one in East Vassalboro. The new system would be better for the environment, Trahan said, because it would cut off discharge. It would also be good for customers, who complain about the water and the smell, he said.

Under the new system, waste would travel 3 miles through piping to Winslow and then get treated at the Kennebec Sanitary District, which Trahan said has “more than enough” capacity to handle Vassalboro’s approximately 200 customers.

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Vassalboro completes \$8 million sewer system replacement

[cm centralmaine.com/2020/10/15/vassalboro-completes-8-million-sewer-system-replacement](https://www.centralmaine.com/2020/10/15/vassalboro-completes-8-million-sewer-system-replacement)

October 15, 2020

The completed sewer line in Vassalboro connects customers' lines to the Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District in Waterville via Winslow. *Morning Sentinel file photo*

After five years of planning, fundraising and work, Vassalboro's nearly \$8 million sewer main project is now complete.

"It's been done, and now it's functioning," said Ray Breton, chairperson of the Vassalboro Sanitary District Board of Trustees. The group of five trustees oversaw the project.

"It protects the environment, and it puts the town in a good position going forward," said Vassalboro Town Manager Mary Sabins, who is not a part of the Vassalboro Sanitary District's Board of Trustees.

Related

Vassalboro to pursue Winslow sewer connection

The Maine Department of Environmental Protection regulates the levels of phosphorous in sanitation, and in 2015, Vassalboro's did not meet requirements. The utility had two options, to update a degrading sand bed filter system or start anew.

After consulting with engineer Richard Green from Yarmouth-based Hoyle, Tanner & Associates and Chuck Applebee of Wiscasset's Water Quality and Compliance Inc., the board of trustees decided to go with a new system. With the new sewer system complete, all the filtering beds are gone, and now collection stations pump to a site near the Vassalboro Community Center.

Dan Marks of Hoyle, Tanner & Associates was the engineer of record for the project. Ranger Contracting Inc. of Fairfield did the physical construction.

"It was a super interesting project and the district was kind of in a tough spot with old infrastructure and an increasing regulatory compliance issue," Marks said. "I'm happy the way it turned out."

The agreement with the engineer was signed in March 2014, but the project did not break ground until 2019.

Applebee's company helped secure funding. He and his company are also the licensed wastewater operators for the project.

Related

Vassalboro Sanitary District moves forward on funding for new sewer connection

"I work for the board of trustees, but I'm also the direct operator of the system," Applebee said. "Myself and my staff maintain and operate the system."

The system runs through Vassalboro's East Village up Main Street and state Route 32 to Winslow's Dunbar Street, where the sewage then goes into Winslow's system. One of the board of trustees members, Lee Trahan, is a Winslow resident and also serves on the Winslow Town Council. Winslow and Vassalboro came to an agreement to connect the sewage to Waterville's Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District.

The other members of the Vassalboro Sanitary District Board of Trustees include Alfred Roy, Paul Mitnik and Rebecca Goodrich.

In the late 1970s, residents of Vassalboro were elected to be trustees, but eventually, the board of trustees became its own entity. It is not a town department, but a group of volunteers. The board appoints its own members, which Vassalboro townspeople and the board agreed to in a new charter in 2017.

The system accommodates 195 households with room for about 30 more.

Funding for the project came from a variety of grants. The board of trustees anticipates applying for more grants to help as more households get on the system. Nearly \$4.5 million in grant money was collected. Money also came from a Vassalboro TIF account and the remainder came from loans.

"I thank everybody for all of the time and effort they put in to put this together," Breton said. "Without those others, we would've been blind to the whole thing. It's done. It's cleaned up and all the beds are gone and buried."

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Gardiner calls temporary halt to new marijuana stores in the city after recent approvals