

Northwest Michigan Onsite Wastewater Task Force 501(c)3

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February 27, 2007

Dear

This is an update on the septic system repair and replacement project planning funded via State of Michigan DEQ Strategic Water Quality Initiative Fund.

Thus far we have received via either email or letter, 171 participation requests.

An information letter was mailed to each developed parcel owner in both Benzonia and Lake Townships and a follow up article was generously printed in the Frankfort Record Patriot. As a result many of you have offered to host 'front room' information meetings where any questions and concerns can be addressed in a relaxed neighborhood setting. I will be in touch again as soon as those meeting date and times are set.

Some of the questions we have received, which we would appreciate your help in passing on the responses are:

1) Q: If I don't need/want this am I going to be forced to hook up?

A: During the planning phase we are only asking for an informal indication of participation in the eventual replacement/repair program. The next step will be to determine how many wish to enter into a formal loan request. The choice then will be to replace individual system with another individual system, or join with your neighbors in a shared neighborhood/community system. Again this is a voluntary choice - the incentive to join may be dependent on cost/ convenience/ necessity. You may choose to do nothing but Benzie Sanitary Code does mandate a timely response to remedying a failed septic system.

2) Q: How long will it be before I can begin work?

A: At the end of May we will have a proposal ready for both Townships to adopt and submit to the State for a loan application. If awarded, construction funds will become part of the 2007/8 State fiscal year operating budget with actual funds becoming available in January 2008.

3) Q: Wouldn't we be further ahead to go it on our own?

A: The choice of whether to opt in to the SWQIF program is purely voluntary. Our position is that if you feel you can't wait for the 1.62% loan then by all means pursue other financing. Our position is also that there are potential benefits and economies of scale from being part of a group effort with regards to fees, bargaining and permitting. No we cannot guarantee that this project will receive funding immediately but all indications are that it has a very good chance - and certainly better than not applying at all! This is an excellent demonstration project.

4) Q: I've made a substantial \$ outlay on my current holding tanks - is it wasted money?

A: No - for several reasons. Firstly your current wastewater collection holding tank system, though probably now both costly and limiting, is protecting your health and your environment while we pursue other solutions. Secondly, it is quite possible that any alternative that becomes available to you via this project will be able to utilize your current holding tanks. Technological and engineering advances are rapid - no one could have foreseen 3 years ago, when a holding tank might have been your only option, that this type of funding or systems would be available and cost effective.

As the major product filling your tank is grey water from sources other than your toilet - we strongly urge you to educate yourself on ways to conserve water usage. Contact the Benzie Conservation District and ask to talk about a home visit from the Groundwater education assistant Valerie Bartell. (With apologies to those long suffering holding tank owners who are well acquainted with the 5 minute shower rule!)

5) Q: Isn't it more efficient to just build a sewer around both lakes?

A: This project is designed to serve both Townships, lakefront and off-Lake. It is also designed to provide the best possible wastewater systems, with the least environmental disruption, at the most logical and cost efficient locations. A large central sewer system requires a considerable outlay in infrastructure installation, maintenance and repair. It also requires a treatment facility and a discharge point, all of which were rejected by residents in prior years.

The current initiative came about at the community's request, through community discussions of what you wanted this area of Benzie County to look like in the future. Any future political action to pursue funding for centralized infrastructure will be purely your decision and falls outside of this initiative.

Our purpose is to present all the options available to you for sound wastewater management, collection and treatment - with the reminder that, distasteful as this may seem to some, that 'wasted' water is recycled and returned to become part of the watershed, surface and groundwater cycle.

6) Q: What types of systems will I have to choose from?

A: During the next few months we will be soliciting and preparing a list of providers and contractors who have experience and qualifications to design and install wastewater systems that can function in the topography and soils in the 2 Township service area.

Some of you already know the limitations of your property so a community/neighborhood system may be your only option.

In 2006 we published a regional education publication "Water To Waste" (enclosed) which is still available on our web site at:

<http://www.michigan-onsitewastewater.org/watertowaste.html>

There you will find a wealth of information on the various types of systems that can replace a conventional septic and drainfield - whether they are going to work on your site will be determined during this planning phase.

7) Q: Will you come to see my property?

A: Possibly - it may not be necessary depending on the availability of local water and soils data. However, there will be a sampling of some property locations to use as reference samples.

Mission Statement:

To increase awareness that water quality is directly linked to the use of appropriate wastewater systems and their management.

8) Q: How will I know what to do next?

A: We are available to help and will be providing information and reference sheets for you to use in making your final decision.

9) Q: How do I decide if this is right for me?

A; I am enclosing a questionnaire. Although some of you have already made firm commitments, this document will help you consider how you use your property and your future plans.

We do not need you to return your answers unless you wish to them with us.

10) Q: What are the hidden costs?

A: There has been some confusion over the requirement from the State that should no SWQIF application result from this planning grant it would have to be repaid. A single loan application fulfills that clause - and, again, we have 171 interested property owners.

Eventually the final costs will include: the principle payment over up to 20 years and loan interest rate at @1.62%; a small administrative/ collection fee to cover the cost of administering the loan program, and a required maintenance agreement. This final part of the loan contract is designed to protect the State's investment and ensure the loan funded system is in proper working order.

However, again your choice may be to make arrangements on your own, or piggy back on a group maintenance contract.

If you would like to discuss the project progress, or have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me

Sincerely,

Dendra Best. Executive Director
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