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Lewisboro

Funding is priority for lake water solutions

By JEFF MORRIS

With so many of Lewisboro's residents living in lake communities, the health of the town's lakes has been at the forefront of discussions for years.

Much of that discussion has centered on the impact of failed, inadequate, or improperly maintained septic systems in the residential areas adjacent to the lakes.

Plans for dealing with the septic question progressed to the point of studies being conducted for three of the town's seven lakes. In March, Town Supervisor Tony Gonçalves said the East of Hudson Watershed Corporation, using funds from the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, issued a request for bids for an engineering firm to complete a feasibility study that would encompass all of the lakes.

The firm that was chosen, Woodard & Curran, had initially done the engineering study for Lake Kitchawan. That study was released in 2021, along with separate studies of Lake Truesdale and Lake Waccabuc conducted by other firms.

Woodard & Curran is a design, engineering and operations management company specializing in water and environmental projects. The firm has years of local experience, having been in charge of the Town of Bedford's large municipal sewer project. Phase I of that project is now complete, with functioning sewers serving the downtown areas of Katonah and Bedford Hills.

Now, with Woodard & Curran's feasibility study nearly complete, Lewisboro officials are focusing on the one aspect of the lake water project that overrides all others: money.

"The first step is to get the funding," Susan Enos, chair of the Lewisboro Lakes Coalition, told The Record-Review. So far, all of the money spent to date on the project has come from grants, which are essential for the project to be able to move forward.

Assemblyperson Chris Burdick was supervisor of Bedford when that town's sewer project was formulated, and was instrumental in obtaining most of the funding from state, county and New York City grants. He told The Record-Review that he has been working with Sen. Pete Harckham in trying to secure state money, and that Westchester County Legislator Erika Pierce is looking to lineup county funds. "Lewisboro has been one of the most active municipalities in working on this issue," said Mr. Burdick.

To date, the town has applied for \$40 million in government funds. "I don't know if we're going to get it, but we're

certainly going to try," said Mr. Burdick. "I'm optimistic, and I'm delighted the lake associations are involved."

According to Ms. Enos, the Lakes Coalition met for a year and went over every possible funding source last year. "A lot of the grants are small, and we're looking to make an impact," she said. She initially contacted Mr. Burdick for assistance, and Mr. Harckham and Ms. Pierce became involved shortly after. They met with Coalition members. Also attending the meeting were Millie Magraw, Westchester County Water Quality and Planning Department coordinator, and Tom Snow, New York City Watershed coordinator, along with a representative of the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

Ms. Enos said her group represents the town's five eastern lakes. "We haven't yet gotten to Lake Katonah or Timber Lake," she said.

'Until we get the funding, nothing is happening.'

— SUSAN ENOS, LEWISBORO LAKES COALITION CHAIR, ON PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVING THE HEALTH OF THE TOWN'S LAKES

Lewisboro Supervisor Tony Gonçalves told The Record-Review that the initial grant request will be through New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation for Water Infrastructure Improvement Act funding. That application is due in late July.

"The idea is to go ahead and pursue that, get the ball rolling, and then work on some other grants," said Mr. Gonçalves. Those will include several separate grants applications, which should total \$40 million, the amount Woodard & Curran said will be required in their draft memo to the town. That memo has not yet been made public, and its release will come before the distribution of the firm's completed feasibility study, which was originally anticipated to be ready at the end of May. "That should be available any day," said Mr. Gonçalves said of the study.

Mr. Gonçalves said in August 2022 that the state Department of Environmental Conservation and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection agreed to fund up to \$25 million for sewer projects involving four lakes: Lake Kitchawan, Lake Truesdale and Lake Waccabuc, as well as Croton Falls in North Salem. An overall budget of \$200

million was appropriated for water quality projects within the New York City watershed, and as one of the East of Hudson communities, the town has access to approximately \$6.25 million for each lake, the supervisor explained. However, to access those funds, the town must form special districts and it is nowhere near completing that step.

Both Mr. Gonçalves and Ms. Enos said the preliminary plan calls for several projects taking place in phases.

In a report issued April 30, Ms. Enos said a wastewater treatment system for all the lakes would have the maximum benefit of substantially reducing septic contamination, but it would also have the maximum cost. "Therefore, a more affordable 'hybrid' solution is being evaluated," she said. This solution would incorporate three components: enhanced treatment systems, or ETUs, where necessary; conventional septic system repair/replacement where appropriate; and a wastewater treatment system servicing some of the more critical lake properties which are in close proximity to one another.

Ms. Enos also reported that, since Lake Kitchawan is a substantial distance from the other four eastern lakes, connecting residences around this lake to a central sewage treatment plant would be prohibitively expensive. The best solution for Kitchawan, the April 30 report said, may be ETUs, which is a simpler solution and one for which funding is likely available.

Ms. Enos stressed the preliminary nature of the discussions and plans, both because nothing at all can be considered without funding in place, and because the details are not anywhere near being worked out.

"Until we get the funding, nothing is happening," she said. "After we get the funding, we have some preliminary plans. They involve a sewage treatment plant for some residents of the four lakes, for a Phase I. There will be a Phase II, and maybe a Phase III — which will not be as expensive because a sewage treatment plant will already be built — but Kitchawan will not be part of a sewage treatment system because they are 4 miles from the nearest connection; it's not feasible."

Concurrent with the efforts to obtain funding, the Lakes Coalition is ramping up a public information campaign that will be needed to explain all the available options, and the initial required planning steps.

"The bottom line," said Mr. Gonçalves, "is that the water quality is not going to get better unless something is done."