

Memorandum

To: Bowdoinham Selectboard
From: Community Development Advisory Committee
Date: July 8, 2019
Re: Recommendations regarding a wastewater treatment system for the village of Bowdoinham

Context:

Over the last 14 months, the Community Development Advisory Committee has been examining the pros and cons of installing a wastewater treatment system for the village of Bowdoinham. While there have been many casual conversations about this issue, and a major study was done in the 1970's and 80's, a new impetus for looking at this concern arose during the community conversations hosted by BCDI in the fall of 2017. The CDAC volunteered to take on this project since the perception during the community discussions was that a lack of a wastewater treatment system was hindering the development of business activity in the village area.

History of CDAC research:

CDAC started by outlining the scope of the project and the research questions that needed to be answered. Individual committee members held informal conversations with homeowners and business owners in the affected area. In July, 2018, a survey was sent out to Bowdoinham residents via the town newsletter. Citizens were also invited to attend our committee meetings to give us input, which they did at several points. In August, 2018, Brent Bridges from Woodard and Curran (Portland) attended our CDAC meeting along with a number of community members to brief us on wastewater treatment options and the experiences of other towns. He answered extensive questions and gave us a good view of the scope of wastewater projects. The Bowdoinham Water District staff also provided helpful information. A CDAC member toured the wastewater treatment facility in Richmond and talked extensively with Chuck Appleby about the history and design of their system. While Richmond has just 500 more citizens than Bowdoinham, their village area hosts many more businesses and multiple-family dwellings.

After further in-depth discussions, CDAC asked the Selectboard to fund a preliminary study which would answer technical questions and give us the scope of funding that would be needed. Wright Pierce was contracted to do this work. We received their report in June, 2019 and discussed the findings at our July meeting.

The report covers the following:

- The potential areas to be served
- Three different wastewater treatment system designs
- The costs involved for each system
- Potential costs for yearly maintenance
- The cost to individual property owners in the affected area for annual fees

Conclusions

Using Bowdoinham tax maps, the committee looked at two sizes for the scope of the area to be served. The first included 27 properties and the extended area added 28 more properties for a total of 55.

- After extensive discussions, the committee could identify no urgent pressure from current or potential businesses for a wastewater treatment system.
- The area to be served is only approximately 50 properties in the immediate village area. The overwhelming majority of these properties are residential. It would be difficult to make a compelling argument to the rest of the community that an investment in this area would be beneficial to the community as a whole.
- Many of the property owners have invested in an upgrade of their septic system in recent years and would be reluctant to now invest in a hook up to a wastewater system. Currently, all the properties are being adequately served for the present residential use by individual septic systems. If additional commercial use is needed in the future, their individual systems may need an upgrade.
- The design of any village system would be a gravity-based flow that would end up with some treatment facility or leaching bed design by the Cathance River. As briefed by Ed Friedman of Friends of Merrymeeting Bay, the Cathance River does not simply flow downriver into Merrymeeting Bay; instead, the flow moves back and forth which concentrates any discharge into a small area with very little cumulative outflow. This makes any discharge, no matter how thoroughly treated, problematic.
- The property that would host the gravity feed would most likely be the back portion of the 20 acre parcel formerly occupied by the public works building and sand/salt pile. Soils tests in that area showed a high water table and poor soil composition for any wastewater treatment. In addition, this area is now under study for a community recreation area that would include trails and possible play fields.
- The costs of constructing a wastewater system ranged from \$2.7 million to \$4.5 million in the report. Annual maintenance costs would be approximately \$60,000. Until a significant number of residents become “customers” of the wastewater system, the town would be obligated to subsidize the costs. The proposed user fee would be \$1,300 a year. Significant funding from other sources would only cover a portion of the needed funding. In comparison, the new Public Works facility cost \$2.4 million.

Recommendation

Given the costs of this project, the limited scope of its impact, the lack of clear evidence of a need, and the other project priorities the town is addressing, the CDAC is recommending no further action on this project for the Selectboard and the town. The Committee is grateful to the Board for its investment in the study that was done since it answered many of the questions we had and helped us to come to an informed decision. Brianna Denis of Wright Pierce did an excellent job of covering key issues in the report and of fully briefing us on the conclusions.

Wendy Rose, on behalf of the Community Development Advisory Committee