

Monthly Updates – from the Mayor – September 2015

Since the minutes from our regular monthly Board meeting are not formally approved and posted on the Village website until the following month, it seems that our residents might be more fully informed of Village affairs by having regular updates posted on our website sooner, rather than later. To that end, it has been decided to provide our readers with some monthly updates, and if there are any concerns or a need for more information, please call (673-3112) or email (marboard@twcny.rr.com) the Village Office.

Public Hearing – on Raising Sewer Rents - the Board held a public hearing at its September Board meeting and approved and adopted a resolution, increasing Sewer Rents in the Village from \$51.91 to \$63 per quarter, the first such increase since 2007.

The background information on the need for this proposed increase lies in the fact that increased costs in the transportation and treatment of sewage as well as the operation and maintenance of the Village Sewer System continue to rise dramatically. Another and potentially more serious reason for this proposed increase is the increased costs resulting from directives and mandates imposed on the Village by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). For the previous three years, the Village, together with the Town and the School District, have been involved in a sewer consolidation project that has resulted in remarkable improvement to the Sewer System, particularly the transmission lines, some of which are over 80 years old. This project has saved much money and would have enabled us to keep sewer rates at an acceptable level, but for unfunded mandates from the DEC. A major concern for the DEC is the condition of the Treatment Plant itself, and its inability to adequately reduce the amount of phosphorus that, through its sewer effluent, empties into Nine Mile Creek – a tributary of Onondaga Lake. In order to reduce the amount of phosphorus to an acceptable level, it has been determined by our engineers that a total reconstruction of the Treatment Plant is necessary, at a cost of approximately \$5.5 million. This cost would effectively bankrupt the Village, but our petitions for some sort of modification of the mandate by the DEC have been rejected. As of January 2016, the Village Treatment Plant will be labeled “in consent,” meaning that we will be in violation of our permit to operate the plant and will be subject to fines and court action. In order to adequately prepare for such an eventuality, the Village Board has found it necessary to build up its sewer fund balance and this proposed increase in sewer rents is the first of several projected increases that will be necessary in the next few years.

A sewer rate increase, effective October 1, 2015, was approved in the resolution, raising the minimum sewer rent from \$51.91 per quarter to \$63.00 per quarter. It should be noted that sewer rents have not increased since 2007, and that this increase will cause the average Village residential property owner to pay an additional \$15 per quarter, from approximately \$300 per year to approximately \$360 per year. It might also be noted that New York Rural Water has stated that a treatment plant that does not charge at least \$1/day, is losing money and grossly underfunding that service. It might also be noted that the cost of sewer service provided by the Onondaga County Metropolitan Treatment Plant, by comparison, is now \$411 per year, and in the next County budget year will rise to \$432 per year. As County officials recently pointed out: “Rates will keep rising to pay the looming costs of the cleanup of Onondaga Lake, upgrades to treatment plants and replacement of old sewer pipes.” Since our plant empties into an Onondaga Lake tributary, we also become responsible for the cleanup – this, despite the fact that the Lake has now been pronounced, “clean enough in which to swim,” and “cleaner than some of the Finger Lakes,” In addition, “Onondaga County dodged a bill of potentially hundreds of millions of dollars this summer when environmental regulators eased restrictions on the amount of phosphorus that its sewage treatment plant can dump into Onondaga Lake . . . The regulators accepted the county’s position that so much progress has been made removing phosphorus from the lake that the additional improvements necessary to meet the standard set in 1998 would not be worth the enormous

expense." We in Marcellus might then ask: why is it necessary for us to spend millions of dollars on a Lake that has improved so much?

As mentioned earlier, this is the first of several increases that the Board will consider in the months and years to come. In order to fund an upgrade to the Sewer Plant totaling approximately \$5.5 million, our engineers have projected that the cost per sewer user could potentially be about \$490 per year, if no other funding is found. If we were able to obtain grants for this project, the cost per user would be reduced according to the value of the grant, and we have been actively pursuing many grant opportunities in recent months. An \$80,000 grant was awarded to the Village recently, and we are hopeful that a WQIP grant in excess of \$1,000,000 will be forthcoming in the months ahead.

Comments from the Treatment Plant Operators – Greg Crysler and Ryan Rieffler – noted that rates have not risen since 2007 because Village has been very pro-active at looking at ways to save money at the WPCP including:

- a. Operation and Maintenance – more in-house and less outside contractor work
- b. NYSERDA grant led to major electrical upgrade at the plant and much saving at the Plant
- c. Sewer Consolidation Project – much efficiency – took over Town / School with same workers
- d. Composting project, which saves the Village trucking and dumping fees
- e. Examining the use of solar panels, in an Intermunicipal agreement with Town and School

Despite the Village being very pro-active, the unforeseen and unfunded mandates by the State, the Village cannot fund this project without raising rates for sewer users this year and in the years to come.

Leaf and Brush Pickup – the Board approved the fall brush and leaf pickup dates. Brush pickup for 2015 will extend from Monday, September 28th to Monday, October 12th and leaf pickup will extend from Tuesday, October 13th to Sunday, November 8th.

Insurance – Sidewalk Plowing – the Board rejected a recommendation by our insurance carrier whereby it was proposed that the Village, because of liability concerns, consider changing its sidewalk ordinance to include provisions that would call for property owners adjacent to sidewalks to be responsible for snow/ice removal. In a letter rejecting the recommendation, it was noted that the Village did not plan to change its ordinance and will continue, as it has for decades, to plow snow from the Village sidewalks. Since the Village owns the sidewalks, this Board feels that it is the responsibility of the Village to repair and maintain them. The insurance carrier's concern about liability is noted, but it should also be pointed out that our Village Code, as well as New York State Law protect the Village "from damages or injuries to person or property in consequence of any sidewalk being defective, in consequence of the existence of snow or ice, unless written notice of the existence of snow or ice was actually given to the Village Clerk and there was a failure or neglect within a reasonable time to remove the snow or ice." The Board feels that this is one of the unique features of our Village and one of the benefits of Village living.

Methodist Church Nursery School Emergency Off-Site Shelter – the Board approved a request by the director of the Marcellus Church Nursery School to designate the Village Hall as its emergency off-site shelter, should the need arise.

POD Application – Update Fee Schedule – The Village Code under Chapter 168, Section 14, allows PODs or Personal On Demand Storage Units. There are, however, regulations governing their use in the Village, including the length of time a POD storage container shall be permitted to remain. "A resident shall be allowed to have PODS for 10 days without need of permit as long as its use is to assist with the moving into or out of the dwelling, or any other lawful use not dealing with construction or catastrophe as described in the Code. After the 10-day period, the owner must submit an application to receive a permit not to exceed 30 days in length from the Municipality. The Village Board

shall also establish a PODS permit fee." The Board approved the POD Application Permit Form as well as established a fee of \$20 for a POD Permit.

Storm Water Management Program – The Board agreed to participate in the Storm Water Management Program offered by the CNY Regional Planning Board and it costs the Village \$3,600 each year. The one-year Agreement to participate costs the Village of Marcellus \$3,600, a cost that is strongly opposed by the Village Board. There are 31 municipalities participating, including the Town of Clay with over 58,000 people and the Village of Marcellus with under 2,000 people. Yet, all 31 municipalities pay the same \$3,600. That amounts to about \$8 for every resident of Marcellus and 18 cents for every resident of the Town of Clay. We have protested this seemingly unfair agreement in the past, and we will continue to object to the fee in the future, but we are, at present, somewhat obligated.

Road Reconstruction – on Hillside Drive and Baker Ave began with the milling of those streets in September, and then repaved with asphalt with four inches of asphalt and we, as I am sure the residents, are very grateful to the highway department for all of their efforts in having this reconstruction completed. We also received comment from some residents who inquired as to when their streets might be repaved. In reply, the Board noted that it is always necessary, because of budgetary considerations, to follow a process and to establish some priority for street repair. That process begins with having the Highway Chief obtain estimates for those streets that he feels are most in need of repair. The estimates for the four streets in the Wilson Tract, for example, included \$32,436.41 for Baker Ave, \$15,460.89 for Hillside Drive, \$44,211.15 for Wilson Drive, and \$43,794.68 for Dunlap Ave. The Highway Chief informed the Board that the streets most in need of repaving were Baker and Hillside and the Board informed the Highway Chief that the highway budget might allow for the expenditure of approximately \$40,000-\$50,000 for repaving. This was the reasoning used in order for the Board to determine what streets would be repaved and why Baker and Hillside were chosen to be resurfaced during this past summer. The Board is grateful that residents take such an interest in their neighborhoods. However, the Board also has to make Village-wide decisions as to which areas of the budget should receive financial priority. Unfortunately, the Board cannot please all of its constituents all of the time. Be assured that every consideration is given to residents' requests for repaving in each budget year, but this often depends on conditions that develop over the course of the next budget year.

Welcome Sign – in early September, the welcome sign at the western entry to the Village was destroyed by an automobile, which also did some damage to the lawn of adjacent property. Following the submission of a claim to the auto driver's insurance, the Village was reimbursed recently, and this will pay for a new sign, which is presently being restored.

The Planning Board – met in mid September to discuss several items including a site plan review for the property at 3-7 North Street, and discussed a proposed change in zoning for the property across from the library.

School's Open – please watch for school children walking and remember that there are pedestrian crossings on Main Street, as well as 20 mph speed limits in school zones and a 25 mph speed limit on First Street, a route that is heavily traveled by schoolchildren. Please slow down. Tickets will be issued for speeder.

SRO – the School Resource Officer Program and Agreement has been finalized by all parties and is in full operation, with three (3) Village Police Officers as School Resource Officers in each of the school buildings.

Notify the Police – Call 911 – Chief of Police Robert Wicks reminds residents, especially at a time of year when mischief makers are more active, that it is essential that they report incidents of crime or vandalism in their neighborhoods by calling 911. Sometimes, residents are not making these calls because they feel that an issue

might not warrant it. Some might be calling the Police Department and will often listen to an answering machine because the officer is out on patrol. Residents must call 911. If you are still not satisfied, please contact the Village Office during business hours, at 673-3112, and express your concern. The Chief would also encourage residents to call the Police Department if they have any concerns about contractors they may employ. The Police Department would be happy to do background checks so as to alleviate these concerns. Residents should also be aware of the fact that First Street will be closed to traffic on Halloween, October 31st, from 5 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. We will also repeat this at our October meeting.

Internet Scam – Chief Wicks has also informed the Board that a new type of scam is in operation and that residents should be aware if they are selling something on Craig’s List or similar sites. The scam involves a situation whereby a buyer offers to purchase an item and sends a check in excess of the amount (e.g. \$500 item and a check for \$1,500 is sent). The buyer will then ask the seller to cash the check and send the excess to an out-of-state moving company. The buyer will then text back and indicate that he no longer wants to buy the object. The check ends up being cancelled and the seller is out the excess money that was sent to the moving company. If you feel you are being scammed, call the Police Department.

Sidewalks – on South Street and selected sections on First Street and Bradley Street will hopefully be completed before the end of the construction season. A very busy summer has caused contractor delay for many weeks and we are discussing some budgetary considerations before finalizing sidewalk construction.

Tree Removals and Plantings – several trees will soon be removed in various spots in the Village, along with a number of tree stumps left over from last year’s cutting. In addition, several new trees will be replanted in the fall in various locations, as determined by the Highway Department.

Thanks to Village Employees - the Village would like to thank all who participated in the work they did on the flower boxes this year, particularly Village employee Kathy Welsh, and our highway crew, whose attention to their care all summer was exceptional and enabled all in the community to enjoy their beauty. In addition, we call your attention to the green space on the corner of Scotch Hill and North Street. Recently, the Village treatment plant employees expanded the landscaping there to address the deterioration of the plants due to the very hot summer weather. The space was reworked, with minimal cost, to provide the existing plants with adequate room for growth and provide another advertisement of the benefits that natural fertilizer can bring. Compost was mixed in with the plantings in the flowerbeds and broadcasted over the lawn area – proudly showcasing the use of compost to resident of Marcellus and its visitors. It looks just great and we thank our hard-working employees for all of the efforts.

Creekwalk – we continue to have a setback with the trail. Because two trees along the proposed trail could be nesting areas for the Northern Long-eared Bat, and because the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Agency has declared this bat to be an endangered species, construction of the Creekwalk trail has been delayed, at least, until the fall of 2015, and perhaps until next year.

Overnight Parking – November 1st to April 1st – the public should be aware of the fact that as of November 1, 2014, there is no parking allowed on any street in the Village of Marcellus from 2 a.m. to 7 a.m. so that the Highway Department can plow snow. This no parking ban will remain in effect until April 1, 2015.

Village Taxes – most have been paid, while the amount of unpaid taxes at present, including penalties, totals \$22,588.26 from 20 property owners, a figure similar to that in 2014. Unpaid taxes can continue to be paid to the Village until October 31, 2015, when they will be turned over to the County for reimbursement.

Scotch Hill Sidewalk Project – having been awarded a Community Development Grant for the sidewalk project on Scotch Hill, we have been notified that construction will probably begin in mid October and should be complete within a week's time. Residents of Scotch Hill will be notified as to when the project will actually take place so that they can plan ahead and they will not be inconvenienced, except possibly for one day, by driveway closures. We would again like to thank several residents on Scotch Hill for their assistance in helping us to secure funding for this most worthwhile project.

Wastewater Treatment Plant and Phosphorus Removal – we received a message from Dr. Cornelius Murphy, former President of ESF, and now a Professor at the college. He wanted to know if we were interested in having a group of his seniors, as part of the final project and a capstone to their studies, look into our phosphorus removal situation. We are most grateful for his offer, and sent him some information that he will pass on to his students. We don't know what the students might be able to uncover, but it will look good if we go into consent and have to appear before a judge.

Lead Hazard Reduction Program – Southern Hills Preservation Corporation provides outreach to communities in southern Onondaga County to let residents know of the County's Lead Hazard Reduction Program, a program to reduce lead paint hazards in privately owned, residential structures throughout Onondaga County. Lead hazards are often found on painted window frames, wood siding, and painted doors. Common repairs provided by the program are new windows, doors, and siding. Onondaga County Community Development Division and the US Department of HUD fund the program. Eligible repairs are determined by a thorough lead paint inspection of the home. The Community Development Housing Inspector, along with an independent contractor hired by Community Development, will perform the inspection according to established standards. Owners of rental units may also be eligible for assistance. For additional information and assistance go to <http://www.ongov.net/cd/leadReduction.html>, or call Onondaga County Community Development Division, (315) 435-3558.

Village Meetings for October 2015 – the Village Clerk has printed copies of future meeting dates for the Village for the benefit of residents. Please note that the Village Office will be closed for the Columbus Day Holiday, October 12th, BUT that there will be NO delay in trash pickup that week. We also note that the brush and leaf pickup dates are also listed on the handout, and there is another reminder that First Street will be closed from 5:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. on Halloween.