

**SPECIAL MEETING OF THE
VILLAGE OF MARCELLUS
HELD AT THE VILLAGE HALL
ON MARCH 28, 2016**

PRESENT: John P. Curtin, Mayor See List
Sara N. Tallman, Trustee
Jeff Brown, Attorney

ABSENT: Patrick W. Cox, Trustee

Mayor Curtin asked for a motion to open the public hearing at 7:10 p.m. Trustee Tallman made a motion to open the hearing, seconded by Mayor Curtin. Both board members voted aye, and the public hearing was opened.

The Village Clerk read the legal notice of the public hearing to those in attendance.

Mayor Curtin explained that the purpose of the public hearing was to allow all interested parties the opportunity to be heard regarding a proposed increase in the sewer rents, allowing the Village Board to adopt a resolution amending Document G of the Village of Marcellus Code Book.

Mayor Curtin made the following comments:

The background information on the need for another proposed increase in sewer rents continues to be the increased costs resulting from directives and mandates imposed on the Village by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). While 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, it is the DEC mandate that the Village remove phosphorus from its plant effluent that is causing further increases in sewer rents.

For the previous three years, the Village, together with the Town and the School District, have been involved in a sewer consolidation project that resulted in remarkable improvement to the Sewer System, particularly the transmission lines, some of which are over 80 years old. The project saved a lot of money and would have enabled the Board to keep sewer rates at an acceptable level, except for the 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 was determined by Village engineers that a total reconstruction of the Treatment Plant is necessary, at a cost of approximately \$5.5 million. The cost would effectively bankrupt the Village, but the Board's petitions for a modification of the mandate by the DEC were rejected. In January 2016, the Village Treatment Plant was given another year to come up with a plan to remove the phosphorus from its effluent. If a plan is not designed, the Village will be labeled "in consent," meaning that the Village will be in violation of its permit to operate the plant and will be subject to fines and court action.

In order to adequately prepare for this eventuality, the Village Board found it necessary to build up its sewer fund balance and the proposed increase in sewer rents is the second of several projected increases that will be necessary in years to come.

A sewer rate increase, effective April 1, 2016, will be proposed by resolution, raising the minimum sewer rent from \$63.00 per quarter to \$75.00 per quarter, or \$12 per quarter – \$48 per year on a minimum bill. Mayor Curtin explained that prior to last October, sewer rents had not increased since 2007, but the Board now finds it necessary to raise rates again. The increase will cause a single family village residential property owner, who uses less than 5,000 gallons or less per quarter, to pay an additional \$12 per quarter. The minimum annual sewer rent will be \$300 and the average residential property owner will pay about \$360 per year. Mayor Curtin also mentioned 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 the service.

He went on to say that the cost of sewer service provided by the Onondaga County Metropolitan Treatment Plant, by comparison, is currently \$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 for the looming costs of the cleanup of Onondaga Lake, upgrades to treatment plants and replacement of old sewer pipes.” Since the Village plant empties into an Onondaga Lake tributary, the Village also becomes responsible for the cleanup – despite the fact that the Lake has 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 past summer when environmental regulators eased restrictions on the amount of phosphorus that its sewage treatment plant could 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.” Mayor Curtin raised the question “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, the increase is the second of several increases that the Board will consider in the months and years ahead. In order to fund an upgrade to the Sewer Plant totaling approximately \$5.5 million, Village engineers projected that the cost per sewer user could potentially be about \$490 per year, if no other funding is found. If the Board is able to obtain grants for the project, the cost per user would be reduced according to the value of the grant, and the Board has been actively pursuing many grant opportunities in recent months. An \$80,000 grant was awarded to the Village recently, and the Board is hopeful that a WQIP grant in excess of \$1,000,000 might be forthcoming in the months ahead.

Mayor Curtin then asked for questions or comments from the public. There were no comments. Trustee Tallman made a motion to close the public hearing at 7:15p.m.. The motion was seconded by Mayor Curtin. Mayor Curtin called for a vote. Both board members voted aye and the public hearing was closed.

Dawn M. O’Hara, Village Clerk