

Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (I O) Meeting Minutes 6/27/18

Attendance: Roxy Johnston, Grace Bates, Tee Ann Hunter, Joe Wetmore, Tom Vawter, CJ Randall, Michael Boggs, Darby Kiley, Lynn Leopold, Dave Sprout, Mike Solvy, Michelle Henry, and Jackie Cassaniti Guest Speaker, Eileen O'connor - Director of Cayuga County Environmental Health

The May minutes were approved. The balance for the I O account as of this June is now 27,189.72; this represents the \$4,810.09 spent for the Watershed Summit in May; part of which will be reimbursed by the Cornell Engaged Opportunity Grant.

Eileen attended the I O meeting to talk about the sanitary code for the septic systems in Cayuga County; this has been in existence since 1994. Every septic system in Cayuga County has to be inspected every 7 years, and every 2 years, or sooner, if it is closer to a body of water such as Cayuga Lake, Owasco Lake and Little Sodus Bay. These are done by inspectors that are trained by the county, but are not county employees. (Periodic checks on the inspectors are done by interviewing homeowners.) The training is done every even year and lasts for 2 days, and a follow up training is done every 2 years for a ½ day. The inspectors are paid by the property owners which usually cost about \$70 (it is up to the individual inspector). The county send out about 3,000 letters a year to property owners to inspect their septic systems, and the compliance rate is 70%, with 20% more after a second letter. Only about 2% fail the inspections and there is peer pressure to have the system fixed. If the property owner refuses they can be taken to a hearing and given time to comply, if not then they can be taken to court. The challenge is having everything in an up-to-date database. Septic systems are also checked when property is transferred. Originally, this test was to stop bacteria from getting into water bodies, but now it is to try to keep out phosphorous. To see more about the Cayuga County Septic Laws, go to www.cayugacounty.us/Community/Health/Environmental-Health/Septic-System-Installation-and-Inspection

Questions were:

I O member: What are the benefits? Eileen: In the Ag vs. septic systems, it helps find problems.

Do people have the systems pumped a lot? Usually houses sell on average every 7 years, so it can be inspected more often. If people put on additions, they may need a bigger system. Contractors who lie about what they install are fined up to \$500. If there are problems with the system there can be a dye test, (ex. If the washing machine water empties to a ditch or there is sewage on the surface). A leach field needs to be 100 feet from a stream. There is money to help people repair their septic systems, up to \$5,000, but they are for systems near water bodies, and can't be a seasonal or a second home.

Why did they start this program? The impetus for the septic testing was that in the 1990;s Emerson Park was closed often because of e coli.

How can other places use the Cayuga County model? Start with testing when property is transferred. Banks want the septic system pumped, but not inspected, so it could be done then and that information could be sent to the county.

When this started, were there communities that wanted to go on a sewer system? (and) How does a septic system compare to a sewer system? Not really it is a big expense. The Owasco

Lake Homeowners Association didn't want it because they thought it would lead to more houses around the lake. Even though it is accepted now, people didn't like regulations. If a septic system is working properly, the soil can capture the phosphorous.

What are the qualifications for an inspector? They need to follow directions, and county codes, take the follow up class every other year for ½ a day, and hand in all paperwork to the county. In the 25 years the program has been in effect, only 2 inspectors have been decertified. (Owasco Lake has its own watershed inspector who walks around the lake.)

The discussion after Eileen left was about what is in Tompkins County....Lynn - Is there any inspection of septic systems in the southern part of Cayuga Lake? No. The HAB report is that 80% of the phosphorus comes off ag land and 5% off forested land. Roxy - There is a growing algae problem, not all of Ithaca is sewerred. Joe said it is easier to fix than the agriculture issue. Tom added that the phosphorus could be coming to the lake from places like Six Mile Creek, from the creek itself as it wears down the banks, it could be "ancient phosphorus", at least 3% of phosphorus reaching the lake is from run-off. Roxy said that the pumpers at the time of property transfers could also inspect the systems, but they need to be certified by the county. The members said that there could be a conflict of interest in that the contractors could say a system needs repairs just to get the job. Tee Ann said the Tompkins County Health Department is about to rewrite its sanitary code and that it might be possible to go to the August meeting of the county legislature and present this information. She said she would talk to Deborah Dawson from the Tompkins County Legislature who is on the Planning Development and Environmental Quality Committee. Tom said that the I O is not a county group and why would they listen to the I O?...Should the I O talk to all the counties? CJ said there are other counties/areas that do require inspections and/or shared services (such as those found in Chemung and Broome County, and Gov. Cuomo wants munis to share services to cut costs.) Darby said Tompkins County only suggests that septic systems be replaced when property owners get building permits to add or build. She will find out about Tompkins County testing. Dave said closer inspections will help future homeowners.

Tee Ann said it was time to send out funding requests for this next year. It was thought that in addition, a letter should be included touting the accomplishments of this past year: the DOS grant, that is soon to be funded; the Cornell Engaged Opportunity Grant (to be given); work done on the HAB's, the Watershed Summit and funding for the Discover Cayuga Lake program (formerly the Floating Classroom).

Tee Ann said the DOS needs more staff to complete the work already promised, such as the grant to the I O. The governor is trying to consolidate services, but needs more people to complete the jobs already promised.

The next thing is the "Scope of Work" for the Independent Consultant to be hired by the I O. Suggestions to the job description and what needs to be done:

1. Increase the pay to \$2,500
2. Pay money in increments when catalogued; \$300 each for Tompkins, Seneca and Cayuga Counties; and \$300 for the 3 smaller counties in the watershed
3. What are the deliverables, draft a list of what is needed
4. Include a geographers position
5. Go back at least 5 years to get a sense of improvement, and how much it cost, and the funding source ex. funded by WQIP
6. Quantitative vs. qualitative

7. Need programs to be compatible with the I O website ex. use of Excel
8. Can it be crossed referenced
9. Get early feedback to see if getting the correct information, and come to an I O meeting to report results
10. Include a start date
11. Mike Solvy made these suggestions: call the person an independent consultant, work by phone, not in the field; I O should do the interviews, not the Town of Ithaca; it should be advertised; no office; use own phone; hardest part will be talking to municipal reps.
12. Maybe us the CLWN website to advertise and/or the Cornell ditching program site

Submitted by Jackie Cassaniti