



TOWN OF OLD LYME

WATER POLLUTION CONTROL AUTHORITY

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Dear Residents and Property Owners:

The Town of Old Lyme's Water Pollution Control Authority would like to call your attention to a situation with our water.

As many of you are aware, certain properties in the Town of Old Lyme are not compliant with the State of Connecticut's Wastewater Regulations. Many lots are too small to support a Code Compliant septic system and several neighborhoods, primarily the beach communities and Rogers Lake, may face potential action from the Department of Environmental Protection based on surface and ground water quality.

One result could be a State Mandated Sewer. However, it is the position of this Authority that it is best that the Town of Old Lyme addresses the issues itself rather than cede that authority to the State DEP. The Authority is actively exploring the feasibility of a Community Septic System as opposed to a Sewer System.

The Authority is in the process of identifying affected properties, and formulating possible group solutions where appropriate. Affected properties need to be evaluated on their own merits and the Town is prepared to assist these owners to find the best, most economical solutions. State regulations and funding, new technology and assistance from the Town should help to mitigate the cost of improvements but, ultimately, the property owner will be responsible to ensure that his/her property is compliant with the State Regulations and will be responsible for the related costs.

This is a matter for all Old Lyme property owners to be concerned about. Beyond the disruption a State Mandated Sewer would bring, the movement of wastewater out of town has the potential to lower the water table.

We ask for your support and understanding as we work to provide a clean and reliable water supply for the Town of Old Lyme. Please follow the WPCA's performance and progress on the Town's web site (www.oldlyme-ct.gov) under Boards and Commissions. We solicit your comments and suggestions and we invite you to attend our meetings (3rd Thursday in the Town Hall at 7:30 PM).

A letter from Mervin Roberts, member and former Chair, Old Lyme WPCA

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Each of us who lives here has a good reason and most of us don't plan to move. Some of us reproduce and so there gets to be more of us. Others learn about how nice it is and so they move here. Many of us who live here live a long time and all this adds up to more people.

Also, many of us like to live near water and so there are areas of Town where land is at a premium and crowding results. Now, land has a problem. Land has a carrying capacity. It can support only a finite number of people and provide them with the water they need for their gardens, for bathing, for washing sheets and towels and dishes, for flushing away their waste, some people even drink water. Really!!

So, clean water has gotten to be a precious resource in many parts of our Town. Most of the water we use, we then recycle through septic systems that have served us well for these past 300+ years.

However, lately, several things have developed concurrently and independently to undermine what had been our Camelot. Transportation has improved, making it easier to live here and work elsewhere. Lifestyles have changed. Today we bathe more frequently, wash our dishes and stuff more frequently. Also, more uneaten food formerly fed to chickens now goes away with waste food grinders to the septic tank. Flush toilets replace outhouses and septic tanks replace cesspools and, of course, there are more people to load septic systems in some areas of Town. The only thing that remains the same is the carrying capacity of the land.

Concurrently, we are more aware of things like health and smell. Also, we have more government watching our every move. As a result, we do live longer with fewer bodily ailments BUT we haven't properly addressed the problem of the carrying capacity of the land.

What can be done? Well, we can do nothing. We already have had a taste of that at Point O'Woods. Here an expensive unnecessary system now pumps sewage about 12 miles to New London for partial treatment in a plant that was already overloaded. The waste water is then dumped into the Thames River for dilution in Long Island Sound. Bear in mind that in Old Lyme this wastewater is treated and recycled in conventional septic systems and we've been drinking it for these past 300 years. Soon we will have to import water to replenish what is being exported.

It is a matter of record that the Old Lyme Sanitarian, while operating within the rules of the Connecticut State Department of Health, did correct a problem at Point O'Woods without a sewer to New London and he was rewarded with a letter from the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection warning him that he stood in jeopardy of having his license from the State Department of Health lifted for his trouble. No, I didn't make that up. It is a matter of record.

But what can we in Old Lyme do? First, in my opinion, is what we cannot, must not, do. We've collected taxes for years, many years, for non-conforming houses on undersized lots knowing full well that they did not, could not, comply with the health code. We cannot now deprive these owners of their properties. We must instead make it possible for them to discharge their liquid wastes into leach fields near their homes economically and without harassment. We owe them no less.

We can do this by finding nearby vacant land where leach fields may be constructed underground so that the land above ground can still be used for whatever it is presently being used. Each non-conforming lot needs to be evaluated on its own merit and our Town must help each owner to find the best, most economical solution to make that property conform to State regulations. The cost to resolve each problem will be mitigated by proven technology and help from the Town, but much of the cost must be borne by the property owner – some of whom have had a free ride on income bearing rentals for many years. Those people who own and pay taxes on lots large enough to accommodate adequate septic systems should not bear this burden.

To accomplish this goal of keeping the remainder of Old Lyme as a recycler of wastewater might take a decade. Presently we are under an administrative cloud but rest assured, we are not now polluting anything. The cost of such a program, if compared with what would happen if we were forced to embrace a structural treatment system, will be peanuts and the final effect will bring us closer to the Camelot of our fondest dreams.