

Riverdale Residents Push To Block State Mandate

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Majority of Homeowners Sign Petition to Keep Costly Municipal Sewer System at Bay



Lombard

By Rosemary Horvath
Herald Staff Writer

Convinced the issue of illicit sewage draining into the Pine River can be corrected locally, neighbors belonging to the tightknit Riverdale community have signed a petition stating their resistance to any government-imposed community sanitation water system.

The petition is scheduled to be presented at the Seville Township Board of Trustees meeting Wednesday, Aug. 14.

It demands enough time be allowed for property owners to replace or repair the few remaining malfunctioning tanks or drain fields now that a majority have been disconnected or replaced.

And it demands the township board's full support "to acknowledge and advocate on our behalf" when coordinating with the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy.

As of last weekend, "about 90 have signed so far out of 118 owners," reported Bob Lombard, chairman of a citizens committee that was propelled into action to study options facing Riverdale landowners.

Theme of the petition is "To Keep Septic Systems in Riverdale Private."

Signers acknowledge "a few septic systems lacking a drain field did pollute the Pine River" but once residents were made aware of the problem, "immediate action to permanently stop the pollution" began.

There is strong opposition to having a municipal sewer system built for Riverdale customers, even though it would be under local control. An estimated price tag of \$5.5 million was floated a few years ago and an updated engineering report has yet to be filed with the township board.

Accurate costs of construction and operation would stay unknown until bids are let and construction is completed.

Still, a municipal system governed by either the township board or a Riverdale sanitation sewer district at any cost does not set well with most Riverdale residents.

"They say they will just pick up and leave their properties," said Mikie VanHorn.

VanHorn, Lombard, and township trustee Doug Becht have uncovered and corrected not only illicit drain

connections but their sleuthing has called attention to problems with county and township drains that also have been corrected.

They are working to outrun an edict ordered by the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy, or EGLE.

Last year (under the old administration), then again last month, EGLE has ordered Seville Township to correct the long-known problem of human sewage draining into the Pine River and an adjacent tributary due to inadequate septic systems.

EGLE's Water Resources Division ordered a community-wide solution which is a municipal system. The original deadline was January but the deadline has been extended due to changing township board members. Meanwhile, continuous testing of water samples taken from a drain pipe at 5th Street and River Street has shown a dramatic decrease from in the thousands per 100 milliliters to 35.5 fecal coliforms per 100 ml in August. Liz Braddock is the Environmental Division Director with Mid Michigan District [Health](#) Department. In addition to providing the test results, she said the health department has received applications to install new septic systems. Two have already paid and three will be on a make-payment arrangement.

"EGLE should step back because we are no longer in violation of a law," Lombard stated. "We've gone above and beyond offering an ordinance with three key parts."

This includes Riverdale will pump septic tanks every five years, have a point of sale/time of sale inspection when a property changes ownership, and will conduct continuous water monitoring.

"They cannot justify what they want us to do," Lombard declared.

Simultaneously, township officials and the community are learning more about Riverdale than anyone ever knew.

Brecht at the July township board meeting reported that the county drain office replaced 39 feet of tile on 2nd Street that had collapsed. This condition caused the drain to suck dirt into the creek. Brecht estimated between a foot and 18 inches of gravel had covered the top of a cavern "that was probably almost big enough to swallow a car," he said. This issue has been repaired.

Another section repaired was on the corner of 5th and Lumberjack Road. Damage occurred when a company had laid fiberoptic cable a few years ago but the contractors had "literally poured through the center of the tile and collapsed it. That was probably some of the reason for some of the backups," Brecht told the board. "It stopped all the water flowing straight south to the (Drain) 178, which is the open ditch almost to Lincoln Road." A catch basin across Lumberjack Road had been singled out by EGLE. It also had been discovered as crushed or collapsed and had overflowed with sewage. Brecht said this overflow made sense because the sewage couldn't drain into the sewer main. "It was crushed. It just filled up and went out on the grass," he said.

Brecht has been working with the drain commission office to map the drains and catch basins, some that date back to 1943.