

'We are serious and we are willing to stop pollution now, and in the future.'

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Citizens line up to sign a petition circulated by community organizer Bob Lombard, right. (Herald photo – Horvath)

By Rosemary Horvath
Herald Staff Writer

Dozens of Riverdale residents made their sentiments clear at a gathering inside the Seville Township Hall on Aug. 14.

They gave resounding support to “no system” in the Riverdale area that would treat wastewater from their household plumbing.

They agreed to put in new septics and drain fields, or whatever it takes to hold off an edict from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy to construct a community sanitary sewer system.

The hall filled with residents prior to the regular township board meeting which concluded two hours later with the presentation of petitions bearing more than 100 signatures.

Community organizers Bob Lombard and Mikie VanHorn had circulated the petitions in the neighborhoods several weeks beforehand and called the meeting for one last “get-out-the-vote.”

The petition language states residents would have their septic tanks pumped on a five-year cycle, an inspection by the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department of a septic system when a property changes ownership, and they would agree to continuous monitoring.

Lombard explained to the group the petition is intended “to show EGLE we are serious and we are willing to stop pollution now, and in the future.”

Lombard, VanHorn, and township trustee Doug Brecht have spent weeks tackling the issue head-on themselves. As members of a citizens group, Lombard and VanHorn investigated who has and who hasn't a septic system. Violators had their septics disconnected voluntarily and employed services to pump and haul waste until new systems are installed.

The health department has received applications for septic permits regularly ever since.

Brecht applied his know-how from his farming days by drawing maps showing the pathways of storm drains and sewer drains. This is something neither the county drain commission or the township had on file.

EGLE has relied on results of water samples the health department has taken at storm drains over the last 12 months that signaled high levels of illicit sewage discharges.

In recent weeks, more samples have indicated a steady decline of bacteria levels.

VanHorn argues the description “illicit” is unfair and incorrect. As she sees it when septic systems were installed

decades ago, discharging sewage into a storm drain was common.

That method, however, has become unlawful. Agencies are in the process of making corrections.

EGLE has forewarned the Seville Township board had to submit a corrective action plan by a certain date or face a hefty fine. At this time, there has been no action by EGLE to enforce a deadline.

At a past meeting, the township board agreed to spend up to \$10,000 to transfer Riverdale drains owned by the township to a drain district supervised by the drain commission. This means all drains in the unincorporated village would be maintained by the drain commission. Costs would be paid from property assessments.

The grassroots investigation also uncovered that the small town can claim three separate drain districts. This also will change. The township board will request the county to designate only one district.

Most of the drains during this project have been cleared. One left is a collapsed drain under Lumberjack Road that has blocked the water flow and continues to register E. coli bacteria. This will not be removed until the drain is replaced.

Brecht is working with the County Road Commission that has agreed to pay half the cost of replacement.

Lombard said the soil types in the Riverdale area is conducive to functioning drain fields. He noted that the health department has denied only one permit since 1967. And even this could have received a variance based on lot size, he said.

This is further proof, he maintained, that EGLE has no standing if it insists reliable septic systems should be replaced with a municipal system in Riverdale.