

Montcalm County officials continue to debate the funding of septic system policing

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STANTON — Montcalm County's Finance & Personnel Committee met for a second budget talks meeting Monday afternoon, nearly an hour of which was focused on the Mid-Michigan District Health Department's appropriation request for \$452,404.

That amount includes \$24,500 to fund Montcalm County's portion of the health department hiring a new environmental health specialist.

Montcalm County commissioners can choose to pay as much of the request as they deem necessary, but if they choose to pay less than requested, the county will see changes in health department services. No action was taken during Monday's meeting.

The Board of Health previously voted on May 22 to approve health department appropriation requests for Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties. Montcalm County Commissioner Betty Kellenberger of Carson City, who is a member of the Board of Health, voted

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Montcalm County Commissioner Adam Petersen, left, reiterates his concerns about the Mid-Michigan District Health Department policing the septic systems of county residents during Monday's Finance & Personnel Committee meeting as Montcalm County Controller-Administrator Bob Clingenpeel listens. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Montcalm County officials debate septic system funding

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to approve Montcalm County's full requested share, while Commissioner Adam Petersen of Montcalm Township, who is also a member of the Board of Health, voted "no."

Petersen remained vocal about the issue Monday, questioning Health Officer Marcus Cheatham about why Cheatham previously reported at a Board of Health meeting that the health department realized a \$200,000 surplus, but the health department can't afford to hire an environmental health specialist without charging extra to counties. Cheatham agreed that he previously reported a surplus which he admitted did not show up in the numbers he presented commissioners Monday. After Monday's meeting, Cheatham checked his numbers and told the Daily News the health department did not have a surplus in the previous fiscal year.

Petersen also pressed Cheatham on a recent \$50,000 rebranding expenditure spent by the health department, which included a new logo, signs and paint. However, Petersen's main concern remained focused on preventing the policing of septic systems of Montcalm County residents.

"I think we all are aware of how opposed that position and that whole septic tank ... whenever you mention septic tank in Montcalm County, it creates a little bit of friction," Petersen said. "And that's part of what this officer's duties would be, to go around and test the bodies of water. Why would the health department be coming back to the well for another \$24,000 when you obviously have enough to rebrand your department? Why come back to the well when we're trying to rebuild what we're already at?"

"If we add the position without operational funding for year to year, we wouldn't be able to do it," Cheatham said. "The operational budget would be broken. It's that simple. We struggle to keep the positions that we have working right now. We've had full-time equivalent reductions over the past three years as we've had caseload reductions. We've mostly done it through attrition. The operating budget, the staffing budget is really tight."

"But the surplus comes from somewhere," Petersen pressed.

"We run deficits one year and surplus the next year and we try to even them out,"



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham attended Monday's Montcalm County Finance & Personnel Committee meeting to answer questions about the health department's budget request of \$452,404, which includes \$24,500 to fund Montcalm County's portion of hiring a new environmental health specialist. — DN Photo | Elisabeth Waldon

Cheatham said.

Petersen questioned what would happen if a local lake, such as Nevins Lake, tested above average for human sewage, whether everyone on that lake would then be tested or policed for septic systems by the new environmental health specialist.

"If they don't have a permit and Nevins Lake is reeking, we're going to knock on the door of people who don't have septic systems," Cheatham said.

"I'm looking out for the taxpayers and how much money they're going to be paying for something they don't want," Petersen noted.

Commissioner Phil Kohn of Edmore questioned Cheatham on several budgetary points. Cheatham said the health department's budget was about \$6 million in revenue and \$6 million in expenses in the previous year, but he didn't have the answers to Kohn's other budget-related questions.

"You're making it hard for me to evaluate this by just bringing one bar chart," Kohn noted.

Montcalm County Finance Officer Bren-

da Taeter questioned why Montcalm County pays the most of the health department's three-county area.

"It feels like you're hitting us hard and we're already poor," she observed.

Cheatham said Montcalm County pays more as Montcalm County has more rural, low-income residents than Clinton and Gratiot counties.

"I didn't write the funding formula," Cheatham noted. "I made a heavy pitch to the three counties during our annual meeting (in 2003) between all three counties to talk about this issue and that it should be on a per capita basis and not based on work. We should pay per capita. I even suggested not doing it all in one fell swoop. I said let's set a 10-year plan and gradually move from where we are to a per capita basis. No one ever moved it. I wish we'd gotten off 2003 on the right foot. It's like wait, this is not fair."

The next Board of Health meeting will be 9 a.m. Wednesday at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Stanton. Anyone may attend.

ST. LOUIS

Cleanup at Velsicol plant site continues

Plans of a recreational area still years away

By Greg Nelson*gnelson@medianewsgroup.com*

Although it may be a number of years in the future, the city of St. Louis has a long range plan in place to develop the former Velsicol Chemical Co. plant site into a recreational area.

However, much more cleanup work must take place before any of that can become a reality.

The weather has started to cooperate and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is presently in the midst of installing an in-place thermal treatment system on a three-acre parcel known as Area 2.

Due to the size of the project, and the amount of electricity it will require, remediation will be done in two phases, according to

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Velsicol

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EPA Community Involvement Coordinator Diane Russell.

"The drilling for phase 1 of the in-place thermal treatment is complete," she said in a press release. "A total of 323 holes were drilled for the heaters, extraction wells, temperature probes and pressure probes."

The installation underway also includes a liner over the section that will be heated, Russell added.

"The in-place thermal treatment vapor and water treatment system that remained on-site after the completion of Area 1 is currently being checked," she explained. "Some equipment will be changed, while other equipment will be added to the system over the next few months."

The heating for Area 2 is scheduled to start in early



MORNING SUN FILE PHOTO

Installation of a liner over Area 2 heating area.

October and be completed by June 2020.

Drilling for phase 2, which will require 448 holes for the heaters, wells and probes, has already started, Russell said. Heating in that section is due to begin in August 2020.

The process requires the ground to be heated to a temperature of 217 degrees Fahrenheit using more than 8 million kilowatt hours of electricity, which cost about \$125,000 a week for Area 1 that was completed last fall.

However, Area 2 is three

times larger.

The estimated total remediation cost for Area 2 is \$25 million, according to Russell.

While nearly 30 tons of contaminated soil was removed from Area 1, a total of about 100,000 tons is slated to be excavated from Area 2.

In addition, the EPA is "developing a plan to investigate portions of the slurry wall to determine its effectiveness," Russell said.

The three-foot thick barrier was installed around the entire perimeter of

the 52-acre parcel in the 1980s when the plant was demolished and buried on site.

In the late 1990s the wall was found to have failed in several spots allowing contaminants to leak into the adjacent Pine River.

"The investigation will also provide additional information on the design of the water treatment plant (that will be installed at the property)," Russell said. "Additional groundwater sampling and elevation data are being gathered for the design."

In addition, the EPA plans to conduct a study using dye to see if the wall is leaking near homes on Watson Street.

Although final remediation of the plant site is expected to be well into the future, the city one day hopes to install soccer fields, basketball courts, an amphitheater, park, playground, fishing platforms, a boat launch and education center on the property.

Health Dept. discusses E. coli in Riverdale

BRANDON SCHREUR
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SEVILLE TOWNSHIP — Riverdale residents are still being forced to deal with an unpleasant and rather messy situation in regards to their sewers.

In May, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department sent a letter to Riverdale residents warning them that raw sewage had been discovered in Riverdale's storm sewer system and, by extension, the Pine River.

As a response, Seville Township took action by creating a task force to properly address the issue promptly.

The topic came up once again during Wednesday's Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health meeting when Bob Lombard, chairman of the task force, provided an update and some growing concerns that he had.

According to Lombard, the task force has already taken the necessary steps to prevent the pollution from spreading any further.

"We are all concerned in Riverdale for the pollution," he said. "We are very confident that we have stopped the source of the pollution in Riverdale. The visual indication of the discharge points and catch-basins are normal. There's no odor, and there are no visual indications."

To do this, the task force identified 10 properties that were discharging E. coli samples and cut them off from the storm sewer system.

"There's nobody denying there's pollution going on," Lombard explained. "Once these people were aware of what was going on, they did exactly what we'd hope they'd do — they were eager and volunteered to have us cut them off."

"(Seville Township Supervisor Tish Mallory) has confirmed with Michigan Rural that they will smoke test either this week or by Monday. Then, I'll request the health department to go ahead and do their testing that we had discussed previously. It

Health Dept. discusses E. coli in Riverdale

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is our hope and expectation that once the testing comes back and the hot spots are no longer hot ... that we'll be off the bad-boy list with the (Michigan Department of Environmental Quality) and that their legal justification or reasoning to be involved with Riverdale is no longer there because we've mitigated the problem."

Lombard's frustrations, however, lied within the stance the health department took in the letter addressed to Riverdale residents.

"We would hope that the health department, recognizing the improvements in public safety, will stop advocating a position of a municipal system," he said. "That is the only thing that we're hearing right now is an acceptable solution for long-term."

Health Officer Marcus Cheatham told Bombard that, while he understood their reasoning, there was only so much the health department could do in that regard.

"We're really, really grateful for your leadership and we understand that E. coli has been reduced. That is fantastic," he said. "However, we don't do sewers. That's (the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes



Mid-Michigan District Health Department Environmental Health Director Liz Braddock explains the test results the health department received when testing Riverdale for E. coli levels during the Board of Health meeting on Wednesday. — DN Photo | Brandon Schreur

& Energy). We do have concerns about the ability of septic to solve the problems in Riverdale, but we don't have anything to do with sewers."

Health Department Environmental Health Director Liz Braddock pointed out that, while the decision was ultimately not theirs to make, their stance on a municipal system was partially due to the health department's testing.

"We have an open culvert that's discharging into Pine River and, as a result of complaints received from homeowners, we went out and did testing," she said. "The test-

ing did indicate that after the ten systems were closed off, it went down to a level of 48 E. coli (levels). We have continued to go out there since and we had an E. coli (measurement) of over 1,000 on June 27. We had an E. coli (measurement) of 2,400 on July 23. Our attempt is to go back and sample two more times."

Given that this was the first that Bombard was hearing about these results, he was upset that he wasn't previously made aware of the health department's testing.

"The fact that you told me there would be no testing until we got the drains cleaned

up and now you're telling me you've already done multiple tests... Every day counts. We can't fix a problem that we're not aware of. If we were aware of this, we would have been backtracking more, investigating more and requesting more dye testing of properties that might be suspect," he remarked.

"We were trying to show a pattern. Taking information you provided, we thought the problem was going to be alleviated," Braddock responded. "We went from a very high (level) of in the 10,000's, down to 1,000 and then down to 48 E. coli, which indicates the flow had more or less stopped ... Now, it's going up again. We can't just take one sample, we need to get a pattern."

After several minutes of back-and-forth, Cheatham and Braddock agreed they'd inform the task force when they will be testing in the future over the coming weeks.

"It sounds like everyone needs to sit down and talk about it so we're all on the same page," Montcalm County Commissioner Betty Kellenberger of Carson City said. "We appreciate (the task force's) citizen involvement, their acknowledgment of the problem and willingness to step forward to solve it ... We will move forward together."

Michigan's 90 degree days could quadruple in 20 years

MAGDALENA MIHAYLOVA
Bridge Magazine

All 83 counties in Michigan are getting hotter, and a report released Tuesday predicts it will only get worse, as the number of days with heat indexes over 90 degrees will quadruple in the next 20 years.

The report from the Union of Concerned Scientists, a Massachusetts-based nonprofit science advocacy group, predicts extreme temperatures will soar nationwide if nothing is done to curb climate change.

The impact could be devastating for Michigan: destroyed crops, an increase in disease-bearing insects, dangerous conditions for outdoor workers, and rising death rates, according to the report.

Between 1971 and 2000, Michigan averaged eight days a year with heat indexes above 90 degrees Fahrenheit. By midcentury, that will rise to 34 days per year if no action is taken to stem greenhouse gases linked to climate change, the report claims.

Cities in southern Michigan — Benton Harbor, Kalamazoo and Monroe — would have the most days with 100 degree-plus heat indexes, a measure that factors humidity into temperature to gauge how weather feels.

But even Mackinac County, in the eastern Upper Peninsula, would feel the heat, as the average number of days with heat indexes over 90 increases to 12 per year from none, while they jump to 27 from four in Roscommon County in northern Michigan.

"If it does get that warm, it is going to have an impact on health, and you might have to start working at different times of the day," said Tom Miedema, president of a turf farming company in Ottawa County.

"You're going to have to adjust for some of those things."

The report joins a growing number of studies that predicts a host of problems, from infrastructure deterioration to lake algae blooms, in Michigan if temperatures increase an average 2 degrees over the next 40 years.

Jennifer Morse, the medical director for the Central Michigan Dis-

trict Health Department, oversees 12 counties including Roscommon. She worries that rising heat would hurt a variety of demographics.

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Related: Michigan shrinks credits for rooftop solar, clouding industry's future

"When we have high heat index days, a big population that really suffers is our elderly population," said Morse. "They are just very susceptible to heat changes."

The report warns that communities of color, such as Benton Harbor, are particularly vulnerable to extreme heat because of limited access to cooling or healthcare centers.

The report parallels the Paris Agreement, a United Nations goal to limit the global temperature increase this century to well below 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit, and predicts scenarios if there is "slow" or "rapid" actions to limit emissions.

Without any effort to reduce global warming, the Union of Concerned Scientists predicts that 8.7 million people — nearly 90 percent of Michigan's population — would experience a heat index of 100 degrees for a month or more per year by the end of the century.

The extreme heat would be avoided with rapid action, and limited with slow action: an average of six days a year in Michigan with an average heat index above 100 degrees and 26 days above 90 degrees by midcentury.

Nationwide, one-third of the United States would experience "off-the-charts" heat by the late century if nothing is done. "Off-the-charts" conditions refer to when the temperature is so high that it exceeds the National Weather Service's heat index calculations.

"For the nation, extreme heat is projected to increasingly put people at risk — that is going to be the case across the country," said Rachel Licker, a senior climate scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists and a co-author on the report.

"This is something that is really going to change the daily life for many residents in the United States."

Health dept. changes water quality officer's title

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STANTON — The Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health's search for a water quality specialist has taken on a whole new name.

In May, the Mid-Michigan District Health Department Board of Health voted to approve a budget with added costs to Clinton, Gratiot and Montcalm counties for the hiring of a new water quality specialist.

During Wednesday's health department, Mid-Michigan District Health Department Health Officer Marcus Cheatham brought the topic up again when providing commissioners with a job description for the position, which they were then asked to vote on.

"This job description, if you read it, is kind of odd," he said. "The reason it's odd is because we are a health department, we are a public health accreditation board ... with national accreditation standards. They say that they want our job descriptions to be written by using core competencies of public health professionals.

"This, to the (Public Health Administration Department), they see it and think it's the best job description ever, while most of us could not read this and understand what this person does."

It was Montcalm County Commissioner Adam Petersen who noticed the job's title change.

"Is this for the water quality officer that you've been trying to hire?" Petersen asked.

"Yes," Cheatham responded.

"Then why is it listed as an environmental health educator?" Petersen questioned.

Cheatham explained that the position, whatever the title may be, had many different responsibilities and that calling it an environmental health educator seemed to be the most accurate description.

"We discussed where this would fall and the sanitary job description didn't fit," he said. "The activities this person would be doing would have much to do with environmental health education and things like that in addition to the fieldwork. This is where we landed."

"You're still putting lipstick on a pig," Petersen remarked. "you're not calling it a water quality officer now, you're calling it an environmental health educator."

Health Department Environmental Health Director Liz Braddock pointed out that labeling the position in this way will help the health department receive more qualified candidates.

Water quality officer

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"What we were looking at for this is a person who comes in with a knowledge of public speaking, communication and health education experience," she said. "(The job) didn't fit in well with being called an environmental health specialist or an environmental health specialist II."

Petersen also questioned why, under the 'Knowledge, Skills and Abilities Required' section of the job description, the "Professional Registration as a Sanitarian in Michigan or Registered Environmental Health Specialist is preferred" bullet-point was listed.

"That's not a requirement?" he asked. "When (Braddock) just said it was?"

Braddock explained that, while preferred, it was not a requirement for applications and that they would move the bullet point to a different section of the job description.

Commissioners all voted in favor of amending the job description to include that change.

Petersen was then the only one to cast an opposing vote when approving the amended job description, with Montcalm County Commissioner Betty Kellenberger and commissioners from Clinton and Gratiot counties all voting "yes."

"Their Opinion, Not Ours": State Decides Ithaca has Funding for Remediation



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City's Fund Balance, Earmarked for Major Projects, Could be Used for PFAS Cleanup at Former Landfill

By Emma Selmon
Herald Staff Writer

Their residential wells may be PFAS-free, but the city of Ithaca is still in hot water.

The state of Michigan is holding Ithaca responsible for the cleanup of a PFAS-contaminated former city landfill. But that landfill may soon turn into a money pit for the city as the state has also decided that Ithaca has the resources to pay for the remediation themselves.

In the fall of 2017, the Mid-Michigan District [Health](#) Department and the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) — now known as the Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy (EGLE) — were notified of the possibility of PFAS contamination in the Ithaca Sanitary Landfill, which was operational in the 1960s and 70s. Residents suspected that the contamination resulted from tannery waste dumped by the Wolverine Worldwide company, which operated a factory in the city until the early 1980s. The company treated their leather products with 3M Scotchgard, a stain and water repellent known to contain PFAS. PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, are a group of man-made chemicals that have been manufactured for a variety of industries since the 1940s, according to the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Included in the PFAS group are PFOA and PFOS — perfluorooctanoic acid and perfluorooctane sulfonate, respectively — which both have been studied extensively and linked to adverse health outcomes in humans.

Humans who ingest food or water contaminated by PFAS absorb the chemicals, which can accumulate in the body, according to the EPA. PFOA and PFOS exposure has been linked to effects on immune systems and infant birth rates. PFOS has also been associated with thyroid hormone disruption, and PFOA has been linked to cancer.

Testing in 2018 confirmed that PFAS were present in surface water at the Ithaca landfill site, including PFOA and PFOS; however, the 12 nearby residential wells tested negative for the chemicals.

The lack of PFAS in the residential wells is “good [news](#)” because that means the chemicals currently are not contaminating anyone’s drinking water, said Ithaca City Manager Chris Yonker. But he also said it “wouldn’t be out of the realm of possibilities” for the landfill chemicals to lead to residential well contamination in the future. “It’s one of those things where while we don’t have an immediate health scare right now, we’ve got to deal with it so it doesn’t become one,” Yonker said.

The city has not yet established a remediation plan for the site, but they are getting closer to one, Yonker said. Several weeks ago, they submitted a 24-page questionnaire to EGLE to provide background information about the landfill. And in a meeting with EGLE planned for the first week of August, they will team up with an environmental consultant to begin to evaluate possible cleanup methods.

But the “elephant in the room” is the cost of the remediation, Yonker said. After a financial review of the city — which Yonker said has a “bit of a fund balance” that is “earmarked for some major projects” — the state decided that Ithaca had the funds to foot the bill themselves.

“They felt at this point we had the resources locally to be able to deal with it,” Yonker said. “Well, that’s their opinion, not ours.”

Although the state has decided that Ithaca will pay, no one actually knows yet what the cost of the remediation will be. The environmental consultant, which Yonker expects to welcome aboard after the August meeting, will work to determine the best course of action for the cleanup — and also provide an estimate for its cost.

After the city can put a price tag on the remediation, they can begin to explore more options to pay for it. Yonker said that the city plans to appeal the state’s decision to see if anything was missed that “might tip the scales in the other direction.” And they have also been doing some digging to try to find evidence that would connect Wolverine Worldwide to the PFAS contamination at the landfill.

There was no “smoking gun,” he said. The city found no records of what — or how much — Wolverine

disposed of at the landfill: Yonker noted that in the era when the site was operational, landfill regulations were in their infancy, and those kinds of records weren't frequently kept. They did, however, find documents that referenced the company dumping waste at the landfill.

"[We found] village and city council minutes and some documents that talked about Wolverine and their dumping of waste there during the time that that was open, so we've got a pretty good case from that standpoint — at least it's in public records that that occurred," he said. "But to be able to quantify and qualify what that waste was, no, we don't have anything specific to that that we were able to find."

After the remediation cost is determined, Yonker said the city could potentially join one of the many lawsuits against Wolverine Worldwide or 3M, the company that manufactured the PFAS-laden Scotchgard used by Wolverine. Some communities are participating in class-action lawsuits around the Rockford area and on the west side of the state; another suit involves individual property owners whose wells were contaminated by PFAS.

But because Ithaca's residential wells aren't contaminated — and because they don't yet have a cleanup bill to pay — "there hasn't been a financial loss" to the city yet, Yonker said, and Ithaca needs a dollar figure before they can seek out [legal](#) recourse.

"It doesn't mean that we can't start looking at the possibility of joining a lawsuit, but we've got to have that data and that information in place to be able to file it," he said.

After the city meets with EGLE, Yonker will prepare briefs for the city council on the next steps for the landfill cleanup. He expects to present those briefs at the Aug. 20 council meeting, which will be held at 7:00 p.m. in the Ithaca City Hall.

THE SECOND FRONT PAGE

Riverdale Volunteers Track Down Problem Properties



Pictured with the Pine River in the background are Riverdale residents Mikie VanHorn and Bob Lombard. The pair have been walking the streets of their hometown assessing septic systems. (Herald photo - MacDonald)

By Rosemary Horvath
Herald Staff Writer

For most of the last two decades, Sherry Root has enjoyed her vantage point overlooking the Pine River.

The Riverdale resident's back yard descends down to the river, providing a picturesque setting that is shared with her nearby neighbors on River St.

There recently came a time, however, when relaxing on the back yard deck wasn't as enjoyable. The neighborhood was irritated by a constant, sewer odor.

"We were concerned but had no idea where the smell was coming from," Root said last week.

At least, not until Riverdale residents Bob Lombard and Mikie VanHorn began investigating.

An open culvert had been discovered seeping sewage onto the river flats near Root's property when the Environmental Division of the Mid-Michigan District Health Department began testing for fecal bacteria and tracking drainage.

The clock is ticking for Seville Township Board of Trustees to submit a remedial plan designed to correct malfunctioning septs and illicit discharges from Riverdale properties.

The board and Riverdale residents face a mandate from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy, or EGLE, to install a community-wide sewer treatment system.

Lombard and VanHorn are on a citizens committee appointed by the township board with trustee Doug Brecht, Gratiot County Commissioner Chuck Murphy, and resident Bernie Shaver.

This group is weighing all options on behalf of the township.

Spicer Group drafted a preliminary engineering report in 2015 that a previous township board ignored. This report outlined the situation in Riverdale and options for the board to consider.

The issue has now fallen on the shoulders of the current township board. Spicer Group was hired to update the findings and options.

Meanwhile, Lombard and the committee worked their own investigation to tackle the problem one step at a time.

Lombard has tracked every township and county drain and culvert in town. And where every septic system is or isn't.

Some systems have septs but no drain fields. Some septs leaked.



River Street resident Sherry Root is grateful foul sewer odor no longer hangs over the river flats below her back yard. (Herald photo - MacDonald)

Lombard and VanHorn identified 10 systems where owners agreed to take off-line and enact a pump and haul schedule.

They felt a setback last week at the health department's Board of Health meeting after learning the problem hadn't been fully solved.

The Environmental Division again tested in June and July at 5th Street and River Drive on four occasions. Each time, results indicated high levels of fecal bacteria although far below measurements from last year or earlier this year.

VanHorn visits Riverdale households and distributes information about septic maintenance, grant and loan programs through the USDA to pay for new septic and/or drain field.

She and Lombard are known as the "poop patrol and Bob is the commander," she said.

"We've got heroes in this town," said Root, glancing at Lombard and VanHorn in appreciation her property is free of sewer odor.

But identifying problem septic systems is only one battle.

Even though Riverdale has disconnected the 12 problem properties, there is still a government-mandated treatment system.

"There is only one course they see as an option for us," Lombard said in frustration, referring to some type of multi-million-dollar sanitary treatment system.

The 12 properties are still only 10 percent of Riverdale's total 124 systems.

According to Lombard and VanHorn,

99 percent of residents oppose a municipal system.

A petition drive in opposition is underway and petitions are expected to be presented at the August township board meeting.

"I am totally against a sewer," Root said adamantly. "I am not in favor of it at all. I don't think the whole township should suffer for a handful of people."

In addition to special assessments added to tax bills, more than likely the township as a whole would have to pay for construction either from bonding or borrowing, even if federal grants are available.

Root put in a new drain field on her property in 2006 after noticing the ground would stay soft and wet. She discovered the original drain field had been sized too small and poorly constructed.

"It is completely different now," Root said.

Lombard echoed Root's sentiments and points to how different the Riverdale issue is. There is clear evidence of clear water draining from the storm drain by the river flats that a few months ago showed sewage draining.

Even the health department's Environmental Health Director Liz Braddock has noticed.

She said Friday that "the flow of water has been reduced and work has been done with illicit discharges." She acknowledged "there has been a positive effect" in Riverdale and that testing water from the culvert will continue to be monitored.

Tracking Illicit Sewer Discharges Can be an Uphill Battle

Rosemary Horvath
Herald Staff Writer

A volunteer Riverdale citizens sewer committee determined to snuff out faulty sewage connections takes on new issues by the day, sometimes by the hour.

Only last week did committee chair Bob Lombard believe he was on solid ground at the July 24 meeting of the Mid Michigan District Health Department's governing board when he declared "The hot spots are no longer hot. The legal justification is no longer there," to warrant an end to the department's push for a community-wide wastewater treatment system.

The MMDHD Environmental Division and the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes & Energy, or EGLE, have recorded unlawful discharges in Riverdale caused by failing septic systems.

Lombard attended the meeting prepared to argue ordering a multi-million dollar treatment system was wasteful money for a town with 124 parcels of which only 10 had been discovered as having septic issues. And these would be corrected, he said.

Instead of forcing people to put money in the ground, he said some residents have a greater need to repair their roofs patched with tarps.

"That's a much more serious immediate safety concern," he said.

But Lombard's delivery was short-lived when informed the Environmental Division had tested water from a Riverdale culvert just days earlier that continued to register high levels of E. coli bacteria, although much lower compared to results from previous months.

Lombard and committee member Mikie VanHorn left the meeting disgruntled and caught off guard they had not been present or made aware of further testing.

Their investigation went into high gear.

On Friday, a Michigan Rural Water Association crew smoke tested tile and isolated two additional illegal connections tied into the county or township drain.

County Drain Commissioner Bernie Barnes had crews clear out the county catch basins in Riverdale, and jet and repair tiles.

Barnes said the drain office by law maintains drains that have been legally established as county drains.

But small towns, he said, typically built their own infrastructure and hooked into a county drain to use as outlets.

Barnes said in many cases this infrastructure is done between the township and the road commission to prevent flooding of roads and to keep individual parcels from flooding.

"In Riverdale, the drain on the west side of Lumberjack Road installed by the township/road commission conveys water under the road to our tile on the east side."

In the process, it was discovered a fiber line had bored through and destroyed a drain tile and broke a road commission tile under the road, Barnes said.

Both were repaired in time to smoke test the tile and isolate any more illegal connections tied into the county or township drain.

Lombard indicated by Monday this week, 11 parcels are now on a "pump and haul" schedule and a 12th has multiple safety issues the health department will deal with, he said.

Also on Monday, Environmental Division Director Liz Braddock said no one from Riverdale as yet had applied for a permit for a new septic system.

A new website for MMDHD under the Environmental Health's Well and Septic link provides permit applications, and septic repair resources such as information for loans, grants, and emergencies.

A list of dozens of registered sewage system installers serving the department's three counties also is provided.

Fees range from \$218 up to \$348 for private/residential sewage disposal permits through the department. The amount depends on which method of treatment is selected such as gravity mound, aerobic treatment, sand filter, or pressure mound.

Daily News

Tuesday, August 6, 2019

ACE award winner



The Mid-Michigan District Health Department announces Jacque Strack, public health nurse II, was chosen by her peers to receive the ACE (Achievement, Character, Excellence) Award for the period April-June 2019. ACE Award recipients are chosen by their colleagues and have proven to demonstrate achievement, character and excellence in all they do at the health department. Strack's co-workers nominated her for the award because they say she truly cares about clients and goes above and beyond to ensure they are well taken care of. The health department thanks Strack for her dedicated service to public health and congratulates her on winning the ACE Award. Strack is pictured with Health Officer Marcus Cheatham. — Submitted photo

Daily News

Saturday, August 10, 2019

Mid-Michigan District Health Department warns its phone numbers are being spoofed again

Submitted by the Mid-Michigan District Health Department

STANTON — The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) has been the victim of “caller ID spoofing” for many months.

Scammers have been making calls to random people all over the United States, using the Health Department’s phone numbers. The scammers claim to be with the Health Department or a Medicare representative. In both instances, the scammer asks for confidential, personal information. The newest technique used by the scammers is to try and get the person on the other line to purchase a knee or back brace using their Medicare coverage. These calls are coming from scammers, not MMDHD.

The scammers are using a technique called caller ID spoofing. They falsify information transmitted to your caller ID to hide their identity. They tend to use a local number from a trusted business or agency, to increase the likelihood that you’ll answer the phone. In this case, they are using MMDHDs phone numbers (Clinton County: 989-224-2195, Gratiot County: 989-875-3681, Montcalm County: 989-831-5237). The Health Department’s number shows up on your caller ID, but it’s really a scammer on the

line.

If you receive one of these calls, simply hang up and block the number. If you get a message on your answering machine, do not return the call. Never give out personal information over the phone, like account numbers, Social Security numbers, your mother’s maiden name or passwords to an unsolicited caller or if you are at all suspicious. Legitimate governmental agencies will never contact you by phone asking for personal information.

Other tips to avoid becoming a victim of spoofing:

- Don’t answer calls from unknown numbers.
- If you answer the phone and you are asked to hit a button to stop getting calls, hang up.
- Do not respond to questions, especially those that can be answered with “yes” or “no.”
- If you get a call and you are suspicious, hang up and call the number listed in the phone book, or on the company’s or agency’s website.
- Use caution if you are pressured for information.

For more information about spoofing or if you have been a victim, call the Federal Communications Commission at 1-888-225-5322 or visit www.fcc.gov/spoofing online.

Daily News

Tuesday, August 20, 2019



From left, Mid-Michigan District Health Department nurse practitioner Jenniffer Efaw and family planning nurse Becky Stoddard met with Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) consultant Linda Gregg on Aug. 7 to learn more about the health department's move to combine clinics for family planning and sexually transmitted diseases/infections. The MDHHS has invited the health department to help lead a statewide family learning pilot project.— Submitted photo

Family learning

Health department combines family planning and STD clinics, leading to statewide pilot program

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STANTON — While many health departments in Michigan host separate clinics for family planning and sexually transmitted diseases/infections, the local health department decided to combine its clinics nearly a decade ago.

The Mid-Michigan District Health Department (MMDHD) clinics were combined in the autumn of 2010 for two reasons, according to Andrea Tabor, the director of community health and education for the MMDHD.

"Firstly, it made it more convenient for a client who may be in need of both services —a one-stop shop," Tabor told the Daily News. "Secondly, it was a better use of resources as there were times our clinics weren't completely full depending on the demand for services."

As a result, the MMDHD was approached by the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS) this past April inviting the health department to participate in a pilot project.

Tabor said the state invite was the result of officials from the two agencies discussing how the MMDHD offers an integrated reproductive health clinic, offering both family planning and sexually transmitted disease/infection services at the same clinic (other health departments offer these services in separate clinics).

State officials expressed interest in meeting with health department staff, as well as spending time at the clinics to determine some best practices that could be shared with other health departments throughout Michigan.

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Health department combines family planning, STD clinics

Continued from Page 1

“MMDHD leadership quickly agreed to this invitation, as it was an opportunity to contribute to the network of providers and the field of public health,” Tabor said.

Officials from both agencies met for a June kick-off meeting in Clinton County to discuss the health department’s program and clinic operations. The pilot period will last from three to six months, at which time health department staff will be working closely with family planning and sexually transmitted disease/infection staff from the state to document best practices, lessons learned and opportunities for improvement, according to Tabor.

The MMDHD received a \$10,000 stipend from the state to cover extra staff time for data collections and collaborative meetings. State officials also contacted the Berrien County Health Department, which offers a similarly combined clinic.

“We’re working with the Mid-Michigan District Health Department and the Berrien County Health Department because they have both merged their programs and we’re working on how to develop best



From left, Malasha Duncan, Jessica Hamel, Amy Peterson of the Michigan Department of Health & Human Services (MDHHS), visited the Mid-Michigan District Health Department on Aug. 7 to learn more about the health department’s move to combine clinics for family planning and sexually transmitted diseases/infections. The MDHHS has invited the health department to help lead a statewide family learning pilot project. — Submitted photo

practices so it can be shared throughout the state,” MDHHS Spokesperson Lynn Sutfin told the Daily News. “We feel this combined model is really client-centered and really offers a no wrong door when it comes to service. It can also help with staffing needs and billing.”

Jenniffer Efaw is in her 25th year with the health department, her last eight years as a nurse practitioner. She gave a presentation to the MMDHD

Board of Health in June about the pilot program. She was also a featured speaker last Tuesday at the annual Michigan HIV & STD Conference in Detroit, speaking about the new pilot program as part of her speech on “Innovative Approaches to Public Health: Partnering with Local Health to Navigate Change.”

“As times have changed, we’ve had to change with the times in our program,” Efaw

told the Board of Health in June. “We used to run our STD program separate from our family planning clinic. As time went by, we decided we’re in rural America and we need to integrate the two programs.”

The MMDHD clinic offers reproductive health services for men and women, including birth control options, pregnancy testing, STD treatment and education and emergency contraception. The cost of these services is based on a person’s income.

“I have a good-sized Amish clientele that comes in,” Efaw noted. “They do bring in some of their high-risk patients and are open to discussing different options.”

Efaw noted there’s a “handful” of health departments in Michigan that don’t offer any family planning services, which could change soon thanks to the ongoing collaborative effort between the MMDHD and the state.

“Ionia County has been asking if we have the capacity to branch out to them, as we are with Shiawassee County,” Efaw noted.

Visit www.mmdhd.org/clinic/family for more information about family planning services at the MMDHD.