

Our Water, Our Future

Croton Watershed Clean Water Coalition Newsletter



Issue #5, September/October 2001

Our Water, Our Future is the newsletter that keeps you, our valuable members, on the leading edge of watershed protection activities. Through the generosity of the Noyes Foundation, both this newsletter and our website, { **HYPERLINK** "<http://www.newyorkwater.org>" }, have been made possible.

EVERYONE 'TRIANGULATES'

The Importance of Hallock's Mill

By Oreon Sandler
Member, CWCWC Advisory Board

I often view the issues surrounding the Croton watershed in the form of a triangle. This triangle has three sides that are described as follows:

- 1) Sewage diversion pipes proposed from Putnam and Westchester Counties to the Hudson River;
- 2) Real estate development and more suburban sprawl;
- 3) Croton water filtration plant mandated by the US Environmental Protection Agency.

Furthermore, each side of this triangle has an impact on the other two sides.

The first side of the triangle is diversion: We see articles in the *Journal News* that our government officials promote sewage diversion "to get under-treated sewage out of our drinking water supply." It comes shrouded in falsehoods of protecting the watershed as though diversion would solve the real problem, which is that aging septic systems are now failing, and recreational lakes are dirty, creating health hazards. That diversion rhetoric frightens the public unnecessarily. Diversion will only make it worse when you examine the other two legs of this triangle.

The second side of the triangle is sprawl: Once diversion pipes exist to carry sewage out of the (cont., page 2)

LEGISLATORS HEED CITIZENS' OPINIONS ...

... when they receive letters, calls and e-mails expressing your views on issues they are able to respond to. Hallock's Mill is a microcosm of the larger picture concerning the treatment of sewage in the watershed. Most experts on the subject of diversion see this piping, or 'diversion,' as the means to allowing massive development in the area, since it will allow unfettered sewage hookup for any unimproved lot. And the fewer obstacles to developers, the more momentum any building project can gather, where currently, appropriate sewage systems must be implemented. Now, if that question is (cont. page 2)

EVERYBODY 'TRIANGULATES,' cont.

watershed to the Hudson River, the promises of limited development will be forgotten. Politicians change, former promises are not kept, and new sprawl will have the advantage of not facing sewage treatment costs. Subdivision developers simply hook up the sewer lines from these new proposed homes to this diversion pipe. That means unhindered building throughout both Counties. Future development will have the economic advantage over other areas of the country because of the mere existence of those diversion pipes. It will be: "Build another subdivision, hook up the sewers to the diversion pipe, no problem." Or: "Build another strip mall, hook up these sewers to the diversion pipe." There could be a nonchalant understanding that any building, built on any site, suitable or precarious, would be hooked up to the sewage diversion pipe. There will be no way to stop this sprawl overtaking our remaining open space.

The third side of the triangle is filtration: Developers want to build small-lot homes to reduce land-acquisition costs. Local planning boards would be unable to stop this sprawl. The net effect is that with no other limitation to restrict the building of more subdivisions, strip malls, and commerce, we get more vehicles, more roads, more service needs, more fire engines and more people. We will need more schools, more infrastructure, more government. We will be exposed to more health risks. We get increased impervious surfaces, trees removed, more runoff. The natural system includes wetlands and other natural filtration systems that clean much of the streams. The Croton watershed will be crushed if we destroy these wetlands and remove the water from the area. Then, we will have the legitimate justification, and even the need, to filter that now-dirtied water, even though our government's own decision to divert sewage created this pollution. That is what we should be avoiding.

A group of citizens from several environmental organizations have been touring recently the waste-water treatment plants (WWTPs) in Putnam and Westchester Counties. We have seen many of the plants and intend to see more in the next few months. We have not found any operated "with a bucket of chlorine," implying inept operations as the *Journal News* articles have claimed. Quite the contrary, all of the plants visited have four stages of treatment, and are only missing the final stage called micro-filtration, a fairly new technique of removing coliform and cryptosporidia. The sewage plants we saw were performing quite satisfactorily, producing flow to our natural streams well within required New York City specifications. The single sub-standard element was for odors, and most of the plant operators knew how to solve the odor problem if it were financed.

The one exception to our experience has been the Yorktown WWTP (near Hallock's Mill Brook), where governing

CITIZENS' VOICES, cont.

removed by the use of diversion, will it be open season on all of the natural world still existing in Putnam and Westchester Counties?

Help our legislators understand the slippery slope they are about to create. Contact them and let them know how you, as a voter, feel about this issue. A sample letter for Hallock's Mill is included on page 3 for you to use in its entirety or to edit for a more personalized correspondence. Thank you for your help! cwc

ACTION ALERT II

When it comes to the sewage upgrades for buildings and sewage treatment plants (WWTPs or STPs) located in the watershed, a number of excellent requirements have been mandated through the '97 MOA. However, Governor Pataki has reserved enforcement at the moment in order to consider Putnam County Supervisor Robert Bondi's "diversion" plan. We can all reverse this delay, and put the MOA requirements into action, by writing to Pataki and ask that he live up to the MOA requirements and begin upgrades now. To read more about this, and to see the sample letter that anyone may use, visit our web site: { HYPERLINK "http://WWW.NEWYORKWATER.ORG" }, and click on the Action Alert dedicated to this issue.

bodies have ignored solving serious problems with flooding at the plant, excess ammonia leaving the plant, and plant maintenance. The announced plan is to abandon all this installed equipment, and instead add pumps and underground sewer lines to divert raw sewage all the way over to the Peekskill WWTP. And, yet, these aforementioned problems can be fixed, easily, without an expensive and questionable diversion plan. Instead of diverting the raw sewage from this plant to Peekskill, this Yorktown plant ought to be repaired and upgraded to the permitted flow rate (1.5 million gallons per day or 'mgd'), and, if necessary, can be scaled to handle 2.0 mgd.

Processes can be added, which is a normal part of any facility upgrade, which can reduce ammonia, and micro-filtration can be installed to remove coliform and cryptosporidia. Throwing away all the invested capital equipment at this plant would be wasteful and dumb. Allowing the permitted flow will allow the existing equipment to do a more thorough cleaning job. That would improve effluent leaving the plant to be well below the maximum pollutant levels going to the brook and on to the Muscote and New Croton Reservoirs. More simply, this upgrade approach would avoid more sprawl in the watershed, something most of us want. This idea of diversion is simply wrong and misleading.

Even if it costs more to repair and upgrade this plant than to divert its raw sewage to Peekskill WWTP, it would be far less expensive than building that large chemical filtration plant – that third arm of the triangle. Yet, the installation of the

plant is what will happen if we try to save a few bucks now. It will mean spending close to a billion dollars to be able to filter this drinking water supply. This price tag does not include the cost of trained personnel, supplies, and maintenance over the years. If we protect the watershed now with upgrades and limited growth, we will save a lot of our own money.

This is not the whole solution to watershed protection, but this idea of diverting raw sewage to be treated at Westchester County operated plants is not only wasteful, it leads to the wrecking of our neighborhoods and the fouling of our own nests. We must remove one of the legs of this triangle! Then the other two will crumble. CWC

The Honorable Linda Cooper
Supervisor, Town of Yorktown
Yorktown Town Hall -- 363 Underhill Avenue
Yorktown Heights, NY 10598

I am a resident of [city/state], and I am writing to you to express my concern over the proposal to convert Hallock's Mill Waste Water Treatment Plant to a pumping station in order to move Yorktown effluent through the county to the city of Peekskill's treatment plant.

There are several reasons why this proposal should be discarded, and instead the renovation and updating of Hallock's Mill should take place. The most evident reasons include the unreasonable cost of the conversion of the plant; the involvement of Peekskill, whose citizenry, historically, is in little position to oppose such an arrangement; and the obvious subsidy to rich developers by providing them with trouble-free sewer hook-ups as they build relentlessly, ruining the character of the town and the region.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to the news that you will choose to make Hallock's Mill the up-to-date and properly functioning WWTP that it should be!

Sincerely,

[your name/signature]