

# A MUNICIPAL WASTEWATER SYSTEM FOR WAITSFIELD

*In bulletin #1, we detailed how a community water system will benefit Waitsfield, including solving the public health problem of limited isolation distances between septic systems and private water supplies. Several people have asked, if a public water system solves this problem, why do we need a community wastewater system? Good question – and this brochure will explain why the Town needs to address wastewater concerns in the village centers even with a community water system.*

## COMMUNITY WASTEWATER NEEDS – WHY

Waitsfield Village has been the center of community life for over 100 years. Nearly forty years ago, the need for business expansion and new services prompted Waitsfield voters to designate Irasville as the Town's second village center. Many municipal policies – including zoning standards, sidewalk and road improvements, and efforts to provide more housing options (e.g., Evergreen Place Senior Housing) – have supported the vitality of both Irasville and Waitsfield Village as centers for housing, commerce and civic engagement. At the same time, the Town has worked to protect open space and maintain the rural character of the surrounding landscape.

The land use and infrastructure decisions made since the late 1960s and 1970s have generally served the Town well, as Waitsfield has managed to accommodate inevitable growth while maintaining much of our rural character. This year, Waitsfield voters

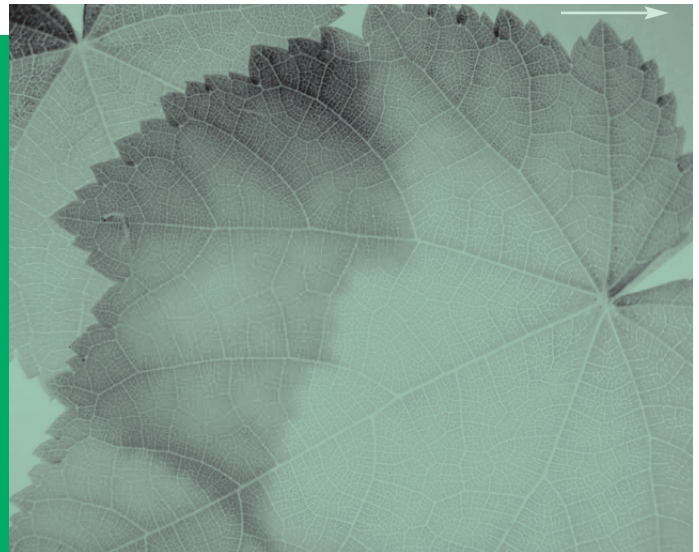
will once again have an opportunity to reinforce the longstanding policy of investing in our villages when asked to support the creation of a municipal sewer system for Irasville.

The greatest challenge facing Irasville is the current reliance on on-site septic disposal and private wells. This has resulted in development patterns that are not pedestrian friendly, as well as an overlapping system of septic fields and water supplies which pose a threat to public health, limit new housing opportunities, and limit the ability of local businesses to expand. Following more than 10 years of intensive study, the Town is proposing to construct a municipal wastewater system to serve the Irasville village area (see map, page 3). There are many reasons the Town is pursuing this new infrastructure. These include:

- New Vermont wastewater disposal rules, which took effect in July 2007, extend state jurisdiction over all private wastewater systems

## WASTEWATER SYSTEM BENEFITS

- ✓ **Balance conservation of rural resources with pedestrian-friendly village centers**
- ✓ **Allow for mixed, planned growth, including affordable housing**
- ✓ **Protection of Mad River and the nearby groundwater quality**
- ✓ **Improved drinking water quality for those retaining on-site water supplies**
- ✓ **Expanded tax base, business retention, and potential for residential and commercial growth in the Village areas**
- ✓ **Costs will be substantially borne by the connected users of the system**
- ✓ **Provide a suitable alternative for failed systems that would not otherwise meet permitting standards**
- ✓ **Conformance with the Town Plan and vision**



and have made it much more difficult for property owners needing to upgrade or expand their systems to find viable wastewater solutions. This situation will only get worse as existing systems continue to age, and as properties change hands.

- A municipal wastewater system will provide property owners in the service area with an economically-viable option for wastewater disposal. This will allow greater flexibility for potential uses of property and allow for the continued development of a vibrant “downtown” for the Mad River Valley.
- As state and federal assistance becomes more limited, Waitsfield has a window of opportunity to take advantage of up to \$6 million in grant funds for these efforts, \$3 million of which has already been committed. This may be a once in a lifetime opportunity that – in 20, 50, or 100 years – will be viewed as either a farsighted decision of the town, or one of its greatest missed opportunities.

## PROPOSED WASTEWATER IMPROVEMENTS – WHAT

The wastewater system is currently proposed to serve the Irasville area only and is proposed to be constructed in two phases (see map next page).

**Phase 1** will begin in 2009 and include a centralized collection system consisting of sewers, large capacity septic tanks, pump stations, and force mains to carry wastewater from properties to the “Munn” site, a property purchased by the Town in 2000 for its in-ground disposal capacity.

Using only septic tanks and in-ground disposal in this phase, the “rated capacity” of the Munn site is 18,000 gallons per day (gpd), or the equivalent of serving approximately 1/3 of the properties in the Irasville area. Phase 1 will also include “stubouts” for service connections to all properties within the service area, even those that will not receive service at this time.

**Phase 2:** When additional funding becomes available, or if voters approve bonding for the entire system at town meeting, or when additional grant funding, and/or the Town’s plan for a Tax Increment Finance (TIF) District is approved and the development pressure is evident, a tertiary treatment facility will be built on the Munn site, which will allow the site to quadruple its potential disposal capacity, there-

by allowing all properties within the Irasville service area to connect and still have reserve capacity for infill growth.

### Why is the project being phased?

The project is proposed to be phased for several reasons:

- The Town is concurrently planning a sidewalk improvement project from Bragg Hill Road to the Elementary School. After 10 years in the planning and design phases, this project is nearly complete, funding is in place, and is expected to be ready for construction in 2009. The alignment of the sidewalk and locations of the proposed water and sewer lines are in the same area and it is prudent – and much more cost effective – to put the water and sewer lines in the ground *before* the sidewalk is constructed.

- The Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has been very cooperative in delaying plans for major reconstruction and repaving of Route 100 from the Waitsfield Elementary School south to Warren, but if the water, wastewater, and sidewalk projects are not complete by 2010, the funding may be reallocated and/or VTrans will simply resurface the road. In that case, the repairs needed for Route 100 may not be scheduled again for another eight to 10 years.

- The Town, its consultants, and state representative have been vigilant in seeking grant funds for the wastewater project, which is necessary for it to be a financially viable system. Unfortunately, federal grant funding for wastewater infrastructure has been reduced in recent years, and State grant funding has been over-allocated for the next several years. Consequently, not enough grant money has been secured to construct a full-scale wastewater treatment facility to provide wastewater service to all properties in Irasville without overburdening property owners inside and outside of the service area. More information about these costs will be presented in the next bulletin.

Phase 1 is not a stand alone option. It is the logical first step to provide a wastewater system with the funding currently available, and it will allow the pipes to go in the ground before the sidewalk and paving projects are completed, thus avoiding costly re-work and other complications if the project waited until a more attractive funding package was in place.

Information about the project costs will be provided in Bulletin #3 in February and will be available on the Town’s Web site at [www.waitsfieldvt.us](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us).

## WHY IS WAITSFIELD VILLAGE NOT INCLUDED?

### - WHERE

The decision not to extend the centralized wastewater service to Waitsfield Village now was largely financial and reduced the project cost by more than \$2 million. Physical constraints, such as ledge, elevation, and existing below-ground infrastructure, contributed significantly to the cost. Although much of the Village is already built-out and has limited potential for new development or infill, its soils are generally better able to accommodate in-ground wastewater systems than in Irasville.

With Phase 1 only providing wastewater treatment for 18,000 gpd, only a relatively small number of connections in a larger service area would be possible. In addition, public health concerns and State permitting requirements related to existing inadequate systems may be alleviated for some properties (such as the Elementary School) when the *municipal water* service becomes available.

Finally, property at the north end of the Village was recently offered to the Town that may provide a more appropriate and cost-effective long-term wastewater management option for the historic Village in the near future.

### CONNECTION PRIORITIES - WHO

Because the rated disposal capacity with Phase 1 is limited, the Selectboard agreed that the first priority for hookups should be for existing failed systems in the service area. Policies relating to how the available capacity will be allocated between existing and new development have not yet been finalized and will be the subject of continued public discussion. After Phase 2 is constructed, capacity will be increased to over 90,000 gpd, and will be able to serve existing and new uses.

### CONCEPT OF MONITORED SYSTEMS

The Town is proposing a program to monitor the significant number of individual on-site septic systems that will remain in the service area, including Waitsfield Village. Through the studies of the service area and conversations with property owners, it is apparent that many people do not know the status of their individual systems, and some do not even know the location of their tank and/or disposal field.

The monitoring program would serve properties within the service area that are not connected to the central sewer system in an effort to preserve the proper functioning of those systems. For an annual fee, the properties will be evaluated for compliance, inspected annually, upgraded for ease of inspection, and pumped when needed. It has been proven in other areas of the country that this approach does extend the lives of systems, and protect water quality and public health. In many cases early detection and on-going maintenance may help prevent massive failures and their associated expense, thereby helping landowners to avoid the major expense that will be required to replace a failed system.

This monitoring concept will be especially important for properties in the service area that do not have existing State wastewater permits. In July 2007, the State took over jurisdiction of all wastewater systems. Properties with a failed system now need to obtain a State permit and are subject to meeting all State regulations. Periodic monitoring may uncover problems that if left unnoticed could lead to a system failure. Failed systems that are uncovered will be required to come into compliance at the owners' expense because the failed system may cause a public health threat or negatively impact the Mad River and should be corrected. In such cases, they may also qualify as a priority for hook-up to the municipal wastewater system if it is located in the service area.

The Town will continue to seek ways to help problem properties, both inside and outside the service area. Some ideas being considered are a low-interest loan program to help property owners with replacement of wastewater systems, and the potential to extend the "monitoring" service town-wide on a voluntary basis.

*"There has been a sharp decline in the number of large public works projects in Vermont. This may be the best opportunity in recent years to obtain reasonable and competitive pricing from area contractors and equipment suppliers for construction of the project"*

- says R. Allyn Lewis, P.E.,  
Chief Construction Engineer for the State ANR  
Facilities Engineering Division, who oversees  
state funded water and wastewater projects  
throughout the state.

## THERE ARE STILL SO MANY QUESTIONS – WHY NOW?

The Town has been working publicly on studies, plans, designs, and funding sources for a municipal wastewater system for the past 10 or more years. The different parts have now come together into a viable wastewater disposal project. There are many reasons why this is the time to take the next step forward:

- In 2004, 2005, and 2006, \$3 million in three separate federal earmarks were secured through the Environmental Protection Agency's State and Tribal Assistance Grant (STAG) program. They agreed then and agree now that it is a worthwhile investment. However, nearly 4 years later, we have been put on notice that if the project is not scheduled to go forward, the federal government will take the money back and reallocate it to other initiatives. This is understandable and good policy.
- As explained in why this project is being phased, we have a window of opportunity to get the pipes in the ground before the sidewalk is constructed and before Route 100 is reconstructed. This window is closing.
- Vermont is enjoying its highest bond rating ever, which means now is a very good time to secure bond financing at favorable rates. This is not likely to last and money will be more expensive in future years.
- There has been a sharp decline in the number of large public works projects in Vermont. This is the best opportunity in recent years to obtain competitive pricing from area contractors for construction of the project while still taking advantage of low interest rates and a strong state bond rating.
- If not now—when?

## HOW WILL THIS BE FUNDED?

Voters will be asked to support a 20 year bond to pay for a portion of the project. The Town has been fortunate to receive several million dollars in federal grants for both the water and wastewater projects, but not enough to pay for the entire cost. The bonded debt will be repaid by user fees, although the Selectboard is considering whether

to ask taxpayers to support a portion of the cost.

The rationale for such a request is that – just as citizens without children contribute to, and benefit from, public education – the community as a whole will benefit from an investment in infrastructure that supports the Town's economic base, protects water quality, grows the property tax base, and allows the town to continue balancing village development with the protection natural resources and our rural character.

More detailed information about the project's costs, funding sources, and options will be provided in the next bulletin in February and will be posted on the Town's Web site at [www.waitsfieldvt.us](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us)

## IMPORTANT PROJECT SCHEDULE ITEMS

### January 31, 2008, Thursday

- Deadline to return wastewater commitment letters and qualify for discounted hook-up fee.

### February 6, 2008, Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.

- Call-in program on MRVTV, 583-4488.

### February 2008

- Bulletin #3 will provide more detailed information about costs associated with the water and wastewater systems and respond to questions that have been raised.

### February 20, 2008, Wednesday,

- Public information meeting prior to the March Town Meeting.

### February 25, 2008, Monday

- Public information meeting prior to the March Town Meeting.

### February 27, 2008, Wednesday, 7:30 p.m.

- Call-in program on MRVTV, 583-4488.

### March 4, 2008

- Vote on Water and Wastewater Bonds at Town Meeting.

If you have questions at any time, please contact Michael Cunningham, Municipal Project Manager at 496-2218 or email to:

[mpm@madriver.com](mailto:mpm@madriver.com)

Information is also available on the Town's Web site at [www.waitsfieldvt.us](http://www.waitsfieldvt.us).

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