

Inflow & infiltration complaints continue in Lewiston, as residents blast perceived inaction to decades-old problem

Broderick, Ritter pledge to work with residents

BY TERRY DUFFY
Editor-in-Chief

The Town of Lewiston continues to field complaints from Morgan Drive neighborhood residents and many others who have repeatedly experienced sewer backups, flooding and inflow/infiltration problems during heavy rain events of late.

Coming off a 5-inch deluge in June that impacted numerous property owners both above and below the hill, a group of concerned residents met July 15 at the Lewiston Public Library to discuss their plight and consider steps to address it. Known as the "Neighborhood Association for Sewer Trouble Eradication" (NASTE), members visited Monday's Lewiston Town Board session where they let their feelings be known to town officials.

"I, along with three other representatives, formed a committee," Beth Ann Elias said. "We represent the dozens of families who have been affected recently with sewage and water flooding ... in basements and our yards. We are here tonight to address the town issues that are affecting our health, safety, our family budgets, our property values and even our way of life."

Discussing residents' new fears of contending with heavy rain events that many link to climate change, she continued, "Many are in constant watch, constantly checking their basement for flooding. Our sewer infrastructure has collapsed. It did not happen overnight; it had decades to deteriorate."

Elias went on to blast the town for what she called decades of ignoring the problem and letting it fester and become worse.

"We realize you have inherited this issue. (But), over the years, our town leaders have stood back and watched this slow-moving train wreck, avoiding the hard decisions and expenses it would take to fix the failed system," she said. "Tonight, the bill has come due - there is no more kicking the can down the road." "It's time to pay the piper, and the buck stops here. We're sorry you have to pay for past neglect, but that's what you as elected officials have signed up for. Stop blaming Mother Nature. Roll up your sleeves; it's time to take some responsibility."

Turning her focus to the town's Water Pollution Control Center on Pletcher Road, Elias explained, "There are many serious problems, not the least of which is infiltration. After a heavy rain, the wastewater treatment plant is hit with millions

of gallons of stormwater that has made its way into the sanitary sewers. The Town Board has been told this for almost 30 years. ... And yet have done little or nothing to fix the problems. At times, the sewer plant is hit with three, four or five times the volume it's designed to handle."

She added, "Many times, the sewer plant has fire hoses pouring raw sewage down storm pipes that go directly into the Niagara River. But that's not the worst of it. The stormwater creates so much pressure in the sewer lines that the sewage is pushed back into our homes and basements. It's disgusting!"

Elias said the town's suggestion of installing a back-flow preventer is not the answer.

"We've done our homework," she said. "A back-flow preventer keeps contaminated water from mixing with drinking water. A back-water valve is supposed to keep sewage from coming into our homes."

Demanding action, Elias said Lewiston residents should not be held responsible for fixing the town's continuing inflow and infiltration problems.

"It's not our problem; we didn't start the problem. It's been passed along," she said. "The town needs to immediately institute a program to replace and repair the worst of flooding sewer lines that are letting in millions of gallons of rainwater."

Elias said a good start might be for the town to install a new sewer line from Morgan Drive directly to the Pletcher Road sewer plant "to bypass the overload forced down Lower River Road."

"Be proactive; start using sewer pump trucks before the flooding occurs. Institute an immediate moratorium on any new residential or commercial building construction."

Elias offered a host of suggestions for the town to pursue. Among

them: engineering studies and follow up on a plan for extensive sewer repairs and replacements; consider sharing the costs with neighboring communities who also use the WPCC; and demand the Village of Lewiston address its own inflow and infiltration problems.

"If the Village of Lewiston is a major source for infiltration, then the village should be held responsible for fixing its sewer lines," Elias said. "The ultimate solution will cost millions."

She suggested Lewiston utilize its annual package of New York Power Authority financial benefits to address the matter.

"Use the \$800,000 you get every year from the Power Authority, the \$1.5 million from APRA (COVID-related government rescue funding), and use it for capital projects. And borrow what you need from the future Power Authority proceeds," Elias said. "It would not cost local taxpayers a cent. And let's not forget about what the developers should pay for all their new developments. And if the situation calls for raising taxes, go ahead. It's cheaper than paying thousands of dollars in clean-up costs, lost furniture and clothes, irreplaceable heirlooms and pictures."

"You can fix the problem or we can send you our cleanup and damage bills, because we can prove you are responsible for this mess. ... Now is the time to fix this ongoing disaster."

Mia Laurie, a 34-year resident of Morgan Drive said she has encountered 29 years of flooding problems at her home, with the last five to 10 years being the worst.

Other complaints ranged from having to repair floor drains, to replacing sump pumps, to addressing gutter and groundwater drain repairs, to contending with multiple replacements of washers and dryers.

"We installed a check valve in our basement to the sanitary sewer," Laurie said. "Despite this, we have had water come though, overwhelmed due to the high-water pressure. It has resulted in the loss of multiple washers and dryers over the years, as well as luggage, clothes and other items."

In response, Supervisor Steve Broderick said the town realizes the seriousness of the problem and is proactively taking steps to address it.

"I just want to say that we're aware that there's a problem," he said. "I think I visited every neighborhood that there is a problem, from Morgan Farms to Lewistown Park, to Forrest and Woodland, and we're absolutely looking into ways to improve our drainage."

Broderick said board members John Jacoby, Rob Morreale and Sara Waechter, as well as WPCC Superintendent Jeff Ritter, attended the NASTE committee meeting at the library and are responding to complaints.

"I can promise you Jeff, Tim Masters and the Highway Department will come out and take a look at your situation and see if there's anything we can do," Broderick said.

He noted the town is not forcing residents to acquire a back-flow preventer to address flooding threats, "but it's another step to

hopefully help the situation."

He closed by saying town is looking into assistance to help homeowners handle the estimated \$2,000 cost to install such a unit at the property.

"Please get a hold of Jeff Ritter, myself, Tim Masters or Mitch Zahno, and we'll come out to the house to assist you any way we can," Broderick said.

Ritter added, "I'm very happy to talk to any homeowners who have problems with water coming in from their sewer. (But) I think there's a lot of discrepancy (from residents) between storm water and sanitary sewer. ... They're not supposed to be together in any way, shape or form."

"It's very disheartening with the flooding in peoples' basements. I definitely feel bad for somebody and want to help them out the best we can. I don't see any quick fixes for anything, except maybe for a back-flow preventer type of situation."

"We did have 200-year rain events (in January and June) ... very uncommon. (But) there's not a wastewater treatment plant in the state that doesn't by-pass during a rain event. ... Getting water in somebody's house is something we try to be proactive at, and we will try to best we can."

Ritter closed by urging residents to contact him at 716-754-8291.

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Backpack Concerns

As the old adage states, "As a tree is bent, so it grows", this is true of our children too. An increasing number of them are beginning to complain of pain in the neck, back, shoulder and arms from the weight of their backpack. The top of the shoulder, where the straps of the backpack rest, has many nerves and blood vessels that serve the head, neck, arms, hands and back. An additional problem is the way some children carry their packs, slung over one shoulder. To complicate the matter, many are looking down at their phones for extended periods of time, adding undue stress on the upper back and neck.

Students should carry only 10% of their body weight in their backpacks, but typically carry up to 30-40%. As a result, a student's growing and developing spine and body are susceptible to any or all of the following ailments: *strained muscles, worsened posture (forward head/rounded shoulders), neck spasms, tingling hands, headaches, dizziness, numbness in hands and arms, shoulder and lower back pain and aggravated curvature of the spine (scoliosis).*

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