

Reply to Les Stachow's Sewer Presentation  
Phil Wilson  
15 February 2018

The basic structure of this reply has two prongs -- an economic development prong and a water quality prong.

**Economic Prong**

- Les's recommendation/conclusion is that we need to start working on a multi-year process to enable the construction two miles of sewer service along Route 1 -- one mile south of the Atlantic Avenue intersection and one mile north of it.
- The economic benefit of this would be to provide the infrastructure for high-density development along this corridor.
- The failure of this prong is that there is no compelling evidence for concluding that high-density development is a good outcome for most of North Hampton's residents.
  - Yes, it would benefit a small number of property owners whose properties along Route 1 would increase in value because of their potential for high-density development, including for apartment complexes.
  - This begs the question: "What kind of development would likely occur?"
    - The EDC has already found that additional retail development in North Hampton -- except, perhaps, small, local businesses -- is not likely. Our proximity to Portsmouth and Seabrook and no direct access from I-95 make North Hampton unattractive for larger, chain-store businesses. (Cf., Unutil study, conversations with mall owner, and current presence of vacant storefronts.)
    - This sewer system would not help fill existing empty storefronts.
    - The most likely kind of development that would occur is high-density residential development -- primarily apartments like those in Hampton and Seabrook along Route 1.
      - High-density residential development is financially disadvantageous for North Hampton residents; an apartment complex does not provide tax revenue that equals or exceeds its costs in Town services (municipal and education).
      - High-density residential development also increases traffic throughout Town, requires additional depletion of our aquifers from additional population, and transforms the rural character of the Town.
    - Sewer bills for businesses can be costly to business owners, if they are individually charged for sewer service -- e.g., a charge for sewer per gallon of water consumed by the business.

## Reply to Les Stachow's Sewer Presentation

Phil Wilson

15 February 2018

- If businesses are not individually charged, then the cost of sewer service, including repair and maintenance, is spread across the taxpayers of the town, as it appears to be in Hampton.
- The example of the current situation in Hampton *vis a vis* Smuttynose Brewery is important for North Hampton to keep in mind.
  - Hampton bent over backwards to attract Smuttynose to their town, largely because of the economic boon it appeared to offer. They even extended a sewer line to service the business.
  - Hampton's economic development committee secured a \$250,000 grant from DES to help build the sewer line to the brewery, and the owner was supposed to build a pretreatment plant with his own funds, but he failed to do so. Consequently, Hampton's wastewater treatment plant is currently inadequate to support the brewing facility.
  - Now, because this business proved *not* to be economically viable, Hampton residents are left with a large unpaid tax bill (~\$160,000), an over-taxed wastewater treatment system, and a business complex that nobody is willing to purchase because of the costs associated with running it.
  - Yes, as Les said, if North Hampton seeks Hampton's assent to connect with their sewer system, North Hampton "can sweeten the deal" by offering to help pay for necessary upgrades to the system.

But, at what cost to North Hampton residents versus potential benefits to our town?

- Why would North Hampton's residents want to help pay Hampton's \$41,000,000 bill to upgrade it's sewer system?
- Les's cost estimates for construction of this small-scale sewer system dramatically understates the costs of such a system. It omits on-going operating and maintenance costs, such as those included in the Underwood study and extra costs of laying sewer lines through wetlands, and it ignores the detrimental effects on both residents and businesses of putting a small wastewater treatment plant "somewhere near the intersection of Atlantic Avenue and Lafayette Road."
- Conclusion: The disadvantages of high-density development, even on a two-miles-long strip of Route 1, far outweigh the benefits to the residents of the Town.

### **Water Quality Prong**

- Les's argument is:
  - In the future, contamination of aquifers from septic system failures in North Hampton will likely require construction of a sewer system to prevent further contamination and, perhaps, remediate existing contamination.
  - Because it takes several years to plan, permit and construct a sewer system, North Hampton needs to begin the process now, including beginning talks with Hampton and Exeter/Stratham about connecting to their sewer systems and engaging the DES to moderate negotiations with Hampton.
- The failure of this prong is:
  - Les does not list among his recommendations that North Hampton can and should implement a rigorous septic system testing and maintenance program to ensure that septic system failures do not pose a threat to drinking water supplies in Town. This is a low-cost, relatively simple, and effective alternative.
    - The Underwood study made this recommendation, to which Les alludes in his presentation, but he omits this recommendation from his own list of options.
    - Rather, he jumps immediately to the conclusion that North Hampton needs to begin the process of planning for a sewer system now.
  - A two-miles-long sewer system on Route 1 will not protect aquifers from contamination in the vast majority of the Town.
    - It will only serve the strip along Route 1 where the sewer is constructed.
    - It will, in fact, deplete the aquifers because water consumed the high-density development in this strip will no longer be used to recharge aquifers after treatment.
    - Moreover, most contaminants of surface and ground water come from storm water runoff and some from wildlife, not failed septic systems. The proposed sewer system does nothing to treat storm water in the area it would serve or in the rest of the Town.
  - According to the Underwood study, the lowest cost way to deal with septage in a town like North Hampton is with septic systems, and properly maintained septic systems also conserve water resources.

Reply to Les Stachow's Sewer Presentation

Phil Wilson

15 February 2018

- Conclusion: Les's recommendation to proceed with planning for a sewer system to protect water quality fails to take into account the most cost effective and probably the most effective way to protect our groundwater supply.

**Conclusion**

I do not think it is prudent to begin going down a path to install sewer anywhere in North Hampton. Once, a system were installed, North Hampton would be permanently and irreversibly transformed without a commensurate benefit to residents.