



Town of Bristol

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MEMORANDUM

To: Core Area Septic Ratepayers

From: Bristol Selectboard / Sewer Commission
Valerie Capels, Town Administrator
Steve Palmer, P.E., VTM Engineering, PLC
Jill Marsano, Vermont Utility Management Services (VTUMS)

Date: July 7, 2023

Subject: Core Area Septic System Maintenance and Budget

You are receiving this memo because you are among the 34 commercial and residential properties connected to Bristol's "core area" sewer system. The system was constructed 30 years ago (1993) and consists of a wastewater collection system in the downtown area, a septic tank, disposal fields at the bottom of Basin Street, and associated appurtenances. Its design is much like a typical residential septic system; however, the majority of the wastewater being delivered to the system contains high levels of high strength waste (HSW) that this type of system is not designed to treat. These HSW organics such as food waste, fats, oils, and grease (FOG) place a significant strain on the system. High levels of these HSW organics also prevent us from expanding the amount of wastewater that can be treated with the current system. Based on the 2023 engineering inspection report, only 40% of the design hydraulic capacity of the system is being used; however, almost 100% of its organic capacity is being used. Unfortunately, the State will not allow us to increase allocations to the wastewater system unless and until we can reduce the high levels of organics. This has the effect of stifling future growth within our downtown area and jeopardizes the longevity of the system.

Maintaining the system is essential as it ages to ensure it continues to operate effectively. Replacement of the disposal field in the future due to a failure from HSW would be extremely expensive for the businesses and residents who rely on it.

Through regular monitoring and inspections, we are seeing excessive amounts of fats, oils, and grease (FOG) entering the system. This has required additional pumping and maintenance to keep the system functioning. This material predominantly comes from restaurants and other food service enterprises. The increased monitoring, pumping, and maintenance affects the overall wastewater system's budget.

The Selectboard, acting as the Sewer Commission, convened the annual sewer district meeting on June 12, 2023. In an effort to obtain additional information, the meeting was continued to June 26, 2023.

It turns out that, in 2019 and in 2022, the Selectboard, in its role as Sewer Commission, voted to increase rates by 5% and 2.1%, respectively, to address the increasing costs of operation. However, thanks to COVID-19, personnel changes, and other distractions, those increases were never fully put into place! Consequently, revenues were not keeping pace with increased expenses. This has been corrected for future billings.

In addition, the Sewer Department has been paying to pump four exterior grease traps for as long as anyone can remember. Exterior grease trap pumping is currently occurring every two months based on the fats, oils, and grease (FOG) produced at these locations. In 2022, the volume of FOG had gotten to the point that our engineer recommended additional monitoring and pumping when necessary.

A number of establishments have interior grease traps that are not maintained by the Sewer Department. Article 7 and other sections of the Bristol Core Sewer Ordinance describe what is required for pretreatment of waste to manage fats, oil, and grease. Without information on the design of each grease trap as well as laboratory testing of wastewater from individual users, we are not able to distinguish which of the establishments is contributing to the high strength waste going into the system. Efforts to begin this analysis and testing will commence this summer and will be an additional expense to the system.

At its June 26, 2023 meeting, the Selectboard found that implementing the previously-approved rate increases would not be enough to close the gap between expenses and revenues. It was also agreed that having all ratepayers pay for the exterior grease trap pumping was not equitable to those establishments paying to maintain their own grease traps and those ratepayers who do not have or need grease traps. Rather than raise rates further, it was agreed that the Sewer Department would no longer cover the cost of the exterior grease trap pumping. For FY2024, this amount will be billed directly to the four exterior trap establishments at cost, which is estimated to be about \$375 per quarter. This fee structure may be adjusted in future budget years.

VTUMS and Sewer Department staff will be more closely monitoring maintenance of all the grease traps on the system and enforcing the provisions of the Bristol Core Area Sewer Ordinance, particularly Article 7, Preliminary Treatment. This may include inspections and the need for connected users to make modifications to existing grease traps, add needed grease traps, or pre-treat other types of HSW that cannot be screened by a grease trap. Each situation will be analyzed and a solution reached over time. A copy of the Core Area Sewer Ordinance can be obtained from the Town Office, e-mailed to you, or downloaded from the Documents and Forms page of Bristol's Web site at www.bristolvt.org.

For guidance and best practices on how to properly maintain your grease trap and maintain regular maintenance records, please contact a trusted plumber or a septic service provider. You can also contact VTUMS at (802) 377-2316 or info@vtums.com, if you have questions.

C: Anthony Delmonaco, Town Treasurer
Sharon Lucia, Town Clerk
VTUMS