

## **Patch blog post, 10-2-2012**

### **How to Get Sewers: Some Advice for Homeowners on Septic Systems**

I've been asked by a Patch contributor to provide some information and advice on what's involved in getting sewers.

As the process is different depending on where you live, whether or not you're already in one of the Town's two sewer districts (Hallocks Mill or Peekskill ), and whether your location has the potential for being added to one of the existing districts, you may want to scroll down to the section that applies to you.

If you're not sure if you're in a district, and if so, which one, check with the assessor's office, 962-5722, ext. 227.

#### **Hallocks Mill Sewer District**

The district includes about 4,000 parcels that are hooked up to the town-owned treatment plant on Greenwood Street and an additional 1,000 existing unsewered homes. With some exceptions, only sewer properties currently pay taxes into the sewer district.

The district has had a long torturous history that I won't go into here. But the bottom line is that a 20+ year moratorium on new hook-ups is still in effect. (The web site I hosted several years ago, <http://mysite.verizon.net/hallocksmillsewers>, is still available online and provides historical information through 2007.)

#### For existing Hallocks Mill homes within 100 feet of a sewer main

In 2011, the Town was able to get the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) to agree to waive the moratorium restriction for some existing homes whose septic systems were in distress. Several homeowners have taken advantage of this waiver. If you're not sure if you're within 100 feet of an existing sewer main, contact the Engineering Department, 962-5722, ext. 219 and ask them to check the sewer district map. If you qualify, they'll let you know what you need to do next.

#### For the remaining unsewered Hallocks Mill homeowners

The problem that keeps the hook-up moratorium in place is that during periods of heavy rain some of the major sewer trunk lines in the collection system experience excessive stormwater flows. Until this flow problem is resolved, the city and state regulatory agencies will not lift the moratorium and permit additional hook-ups.

But correcting the stormwater flow problem is not easy because finding where and how the stormwater is entering the sewer lines is not easy. For example, in 2011 TV cameras were actually sent through some of the trunk lines that were experiencing excessive flows but the cameras were not able to detect any problem; the source of stormwater was not found and remains a mystery to this day.

After the inconclusive TV inspection program, the administration began exploring other ways to deal with the stormwater problem. But before any decisions could be made on possible next steps, there was an election that resulted in a change in the Town's approach.

Current Supervisor Michael Grace's approach to resolving the Hallocks Mill problem is to revisit a "partial diversion" idea initially raised in the 1990s; the plan would divert the sewage from about 1,000 already sewer

Hallocks Mill homes in the northeast section of the Hallocks Mill district to the Peekskill sewage treatment plant. For this to happen, the Town would need the approval of the Westchester County Board of Legislators which, many Hallocks Mill residents will recall, refused to support a more extensive diversion plan several years ago. (The feasibility of the partial diversion idea was reviewed in 2011 by the prior administration and, although technically feasible, it was not pursued because of the cost and also political reasons.)

The Grace administration is currently planning to meet with representatives of Cortlandt, Peekskill and Somers (the other municipalities that are part of the Peekskill district) to see if the four communities can come to an agreement on how to allocate the remaining unused capacity in the Peekskill plant. The hope is that if the four municipalities can arrive at a consensus on the issue, the Board of Legislators will approve the partial diversion plan. It should be noted, however, that if partial diversion was to become a reality, it would not solve the excessive stormwater flow problem for some of the major trunk lines that would service many of the unsewered neighborhoods.

So, regrettably, for all of you who want sewers, it's still wait and see. And in the meantime I'm painfully aware of the fact that as a resolution of the Hallocks Mill situation drags on and on, many of you face the predicament of what to do with your ailing septic system; the more you have to spend today to fix your system, the less likely you'll want to pay for sewers in the event they become possible in the future.

I wish the process could be speeded up, but Yorktown doesn't control the situation; like it or not, we have to work with regulatory agencies and other municipalities. Unfortunately, the problem is as much political as it is practical.

My best advice to you: Keep in touch with Town officials and keep urging them to make sewers a priority issue. Whether we solve the Hallocks Mill problem on our own, or do it cooperatively with other municipalities, the initiative must come from our elected officials. The ball's in their court. Call frequently and don't let your elected officials shuffle the issue aside.

While I no longer send out routine email updates on the Hallocks Mill situation, if you send me your email address (my email is: [bookhunterpress@verizon.net](mailto:bookhunterpress@verizon.net)) , I'd be glad to keep you informed as discussions move forward.

### **Peekskill Sanitary Sewer District**

#### For those who are already paying taxes into the Peekskill district

If you want sewers, my advice is that you talk to your neighbors and gauge their interest in hooking up. Depending on the topography of your street/s, a "neighborhood" can be as small as about 20 homes. If more than 50% of the homeowners are interested in being sewerred, then your first step should be to contact Town Engineer Sharon Robinson. She can discuss any technical issues with you as well as what sewers might cost. If, based on the additional information, at least 50% of the neighborhood remains interested, then your next step should be to contact the Town Board. The Board will only proceed to create a sewer district for your neighborhood if there's sufficient interest. Getting sewers requires a strong neighborhood commitment and grassroots support and determination. Good luck.

#### For those not in the Peekskill district

Depending on location, it may be possible for homeowners on some streets to petition the Town and the County to be added to the Peekskill district. My advice is to first check with the Engineering Department to see if your

street has the potential to be added to the district. If it does, then your next step would be to find out if there's sufficient interest among your neighbors in being sewerred. If there is, then follow the above advice.

**And while you remain on a septic system**

Here's some advice on how to maintain your system and hopefully prolong its life:

<http://www.yorktownny.org/engineeringandsewer/maintaining-your-septic-system>

And, for those in the Peekskill district, check with the Engineering Department about the availability of county funds for pumping out your septic tank.