

Four County Wastewater Task Force
4/19/2010
Escollo Room, The Lodge of 4 Seasons

2:00 pm Donna Swall, Executive Director Lake of the Ozarks Watershed Alliance, opened this meeting with a welcome and a prepared statement that ended with the wastewater issue around the Lake of the Ozarks being “an issue for the people to decide”. Introduced first was Bill McCaffree, Environmental Attorney, who has worked on projects in all 4 of LOZ’s surrounding counties and previously owned a home for many years at the Lake of the Ozarks (LOZ).

Bill McCaffree: We need to establish as fact and we are not going to debate whether septics are failing or whether wells are being contaminated. The 4-county LOZ region needs to be working toward comprehensive public sewer treatment at the Lake that can be maintained with appropriate expertise. Sewage treatment is becoming more complicated and there needs to be someone with expertise to run these facilities. Small operations cannot generate the funds to pay the salary to hire professionals with the appropriate expertise but regional treatment can. Regional treatment lets real experts run the plants. Engineers, local governments, and developers have been trying everything to deal with the sewer issue at the Lake: city systems, joint municipal systems, systems run by county districts. This room is filled with expertise. Districts have turned to Chapter 204, water and sewer is under Chap 247. There are individual septics and group systems. Trying to bring everyone together would run at least \$150 Million, not even counting operations and management (O&M).

The Lake of the Ozarks presents a problem unique to our nation. In order to get the septics off of the shoreline, sewage will have to be pumped uphill and there are large distances, exceeding the shoreline of California. Economics says treatment plants must go to areas that can pay for them, and then move on. Of necessity, then, is the cherry picking of placing treatment plants in areas of high enough density. The geology of the Lake area is not ideal for septics and the Lake experiences unique peak flow multipliers. Whereas a treatment plant will have to treat a fairly low volume for most of the year, certain summer months and especially certain weekends place extremely large flows for the plants. So the volume of waste to be treated varies greatly during the year. That I&I kills the feasibility of systems that must show a profit and pay off loans. Regional sustained cooperation seems impractical and sharing is not a well-received concept. The *Kansas City Star* article from December 2009 did a good job of background, summarizing past studies and giving details of the lake. The studies that have been done discussed how the karst geology of the Lake area allows lateral field effluent to migrate underground. And, through the year, there is a lot of variation in the amount of flow with the flow in December being 1/7 that of flow in July.

If one community must buy sewage treatment from another community, problems can arise as councils change, ideas change, and fees can change too. Communities would share treatment costs, but not building costs, and it would be hard for fees to be fair. Sometimes there are turf problems. Recently a sewer deal fell through at the Lake because the treatment plant involved couldn’t risk having to expand before they are ready. True regional planning is almost impossible to get. Winston Churchill once said,

“Americans always do precisely the right thing... ..after they’ve tried practically everything else.”

There’s going to be septic systems and private systems on the lake for a long time because there is not enough money available. It’ll take 20 years to get this all taken care of. For example, it took Clarence Cannon a cooperative effort of numerous entities to be able to buy water efficiently and at a good cost. It took Sullivan 10-12 years to put together several municipal and water districts together to create a reservoir for a stable supply of water by combining resources. So, situations don’t always get federal money. Questions: If we can provide responsible treatment, would needed projects finally become feasible given traditional financing? How many projects have had to be restricted because of not enough for collection and treatment?

Why can’t we get 100% grants? Osage Beach got one. That program (under the Federal Clean Water Act) ended in 1988. Money now available is from EPA through the state and is probably going to be matching and loans. This year MO had \$26 Million available for loans and \$9 Million available in grants and that was from stimulus money.

Could we take a burden off of local projects by creating a system of treatment hubs and spokes at no cost or reasonable cost so municipalities can come on board? What if Regional Hubs and Spokes provide treatment? Some new systems – clusters – are having to be picked up but this needs a large input of \$\$\$. So we have some lines from the cherry picked locations, but we are still not reaching homes on the shoreline. Can our engineers put all this in high gear? If the Lake provides local funding for hubs and spokes and, as possible reduce O&M, will DNR, SRF, 40% grant, Rural Sewer grant, USDA loan, USDA grant needs be reduced?

If you want the economy of a regional solution, is treatment the place to get it? Yes – it provides better treatment, more reliable quality of treatment, is more cost effective, and better affords maintenance with quantity. The Solution must earn local support.

Therefore it must lesson the burden of cost, not interfere with local choice of professionals, and not impose new layers of planning and regulation. The Solution must provide a permanent and fair sharing and be such a good idea that all would know it is the right thing to do for the Lake of the Ozarks.

How have people done who waited for grants? There must be local responsibility taken, but how? Why haven’t we done something yet? There is no perfect vehicle in MO law. These ideas are not new and regional districts have been discussed repeatedly. The fairest tax is a sales tax – all who spend money here are helping – not just locals – and sales taxes are not an unfair burden on the poor. Taney County passed a sales tax that gets pumped into their sewage operations. It took them 10 years from organization to construction. Voters passed it because they knew they wouldn’t have tourists if they didn’t have sewers. They made it an issue the people needed to decide. We need to do the same here at the Lake, and make it an issue that the people can decide. \$6.5 Million to \$7 Million could be raised from a sales tax [ed note – a ½ cent sales for a four-county tax on \$1.3-1.4 Billion in taxable sales would generate this amount].

The People must decide: Should the sewage service district be organized for everyone to be able to use it? The “haves” have treatment and the “have nots” do not have treatment. The “haves” need increased capacity and more lines all the time these days and are constantly having to upgrade to new standards. Therefore, this kind of deal can be a

blessing for them too. A hub and spoke system can help the “haves” expand and the “have nots” can get treatment. Can everyone profit from this?

A Message to Legislators: Please give us the machinery we need to put together a sewer service district and a 4-county sales tax and create cooperative agreements with the water districts.

Our Lake of the Ozarks is the Queen of Vacation Spots for the Midwest. Having 4 counties around the Lake is a problem.

A Message to Local Businesses and Governments: There has to be a time when we start comprehensive public sewage treatment for the lake. Has the time arrived? Is it time to start looking at a regional solution to wastewater around the Lake?

We need to explain the issue and let the people decide: Should we get this matter rolling now? If we are willing to take local action, the legislature may be willing to help with the machinery.

LOWA (Lake of the Ozarks Watershed Alliance) is being proactive before we get a big problem. We want to be the Model Healthiest Lake in the country. We need the four counties to get together.

Jim Rogers – LOWA Wastewater Chair – spoke next. The HNTB engineering study, commissioned by a four county task force on wastewater at the lake and published in 1999, referred to as the Phase I Study, did have the support of all 4 counties. A resolution was signed by all 4 County Commissioners at the time, supporting the Phase I Study. Since then, 3 sets of County Commissioners have come and gone with no action taken. Now is the time to begin working on a long term solution for a long term issue. LOZ is safe today and we are ensuring it will stay safe and healthy. LOZ has been a very forgiving lake but let’s address this issue now to protect the Lake forever.

Meeting adjourned at 3:20 pm.

These minutes respectfully submitted by C. King Toole, LOWA Recording Sec’y.

Approved by Donna Swall, LOWA Executive Director.