

Report of:

**Meeting With Rockland County Sewer District No. 1  
Conducted 10/05/05**

Prepared For:  
Village of Airmont  
Board of Trustees  
October 17, 2005

Ronald A. Glisci, P.E.  
Committee Member  
Airmont Quality of Life Committee

**INTRODUCTION:**

The information contained herein was obtained at a meeting conducted on 10/05/05 at the offices of the Rockland County Sewer District No 1, located at 4 Route 340, Orangeburg, New York, 10952.

In attendance were:

Ms. Dianne Phillips, P.E.	Executive Director, RCSD No. 1
Mr. Anthony Valanti:	Trustee, Village of Airmont
Mr Brian Brooker, P.E:	Village Engineer, Airmont - Brooker & Associates
Mr. Ronald A. Glisci, P.E.	Committee Member -Airmont Quality of Life Committee

This information is believed to be accurate and complete. Our request to record the proceedings to ensure accuracy and detail was denied by the RCSD.

## I. SUMMARY

1. The sanitary sewer system was designed in the sixties when the population of Rockland County was approximately 59,000 people. It was originally deemed adequate for the future needs of up to 180,000 people.

The current population of Rockland County is approximately 300,000 people. The overall piping system was not designed to handle the current flow.

We were not given any data by the RCSD to allow us to determine how far beyond the original design basis we currently are, or how much additional flow can be safely handled.

*The main issues and questions of system inadequacy therefore remain.*

2. The zoning changes enacted by the Town of Ramapo have not been quantified, and will have a significant impact on the system.
3. Overflows at the manhole on S. Monsey Road, where all the sewage flow from Airmont, the New Jersey border, and parts of Western Ramapo enters the interceptor, are occurring with ever increasing frequency. The most recent overflows occurred on October 8, October 12 and October 14, 2005. The continuous overflow on October 14<sup>th</sup> lasted for approximately 2 hours.

Flow from the new Patrick Farm development will enter the interceptor at this S. Monsey Road location.

Flow from development on Hillside Avenue will enter the interceptor at this S. Monsey Road location.

*The changes in zoning and increased sewage flow from these "mini-cities" will definitely have an impact on the overflow problem.*

## II. RCSD ROLE IN DEVELOPMENT

When a developer proposes to develop a piece of property that is currently zoned for less than what the developer intends, a plan must be submitted to the Rockland County Sewer district for comment.

The RCSD determines the amount of additional sewage flow that will be generated, and imposes a sewage impact fee, the magnitude of which is based on the number of sewer system units above which would have been allowed under the original zoning.

This money is put into a RCSD fund to help plan and pay for future upgrades.

A typical comment made by the RCSD in response to such a plan submittal would be as follows:

"The existing system has adequate capacity, at this time, to handle the anticipated flow from this site, however the practice of increasing density and consequently sewage flow from properties within the district may lead to an overload of the Sewer Districts facilities in the future."

### Key Findings

1. The determinations of whether or not the existing sewer lines are capable of handling the increased flow appear to be made without knowledge or consideration of the actual current flow in the lines that will receive the increased flow. *No flow measurement has been done.*
2. There is currently no system in place by which additional flow from new development is cumulatively quantified. No one is adding up all the flows from the already approved developments. No one knows how much flow we now have in the main sewer lines. No one can determine which project will be the one that officially overloads the sewers.
3. The RCSD states that the capability to conduct meaningful flow measurement to determine sewer line capacity is not known. Budget restraints for purchase of the proper flow measurement devices would have to be investigated further.
4. The RCSD has no power or authority to stop a proposed development, even if it is determined that the existing sewer lines *cannot* safely handle the increased flow. Their responsibility is limited to writing a letter concerning the project, with their comments or recommendations.
5. The comments of the RCSD are sent to the town planning board, which is under no obligation to follow the comments or recommendations. It is up to the town to decide if the comments are acceptable or unacceptable.
6. The town planning board has the authority and *is* making the decisions to allow development that increases sewage flow over what was originally intended by the sewer design engineers. If the RCSD declares that a project will increase the sewage flow to

levels that the existing system cannot adequately handle, the planning board is under no obligation to take that information into account.

*The Planning Board determines whether or not the concerns of Licensed Professional Engineers are legitimate.*

7. The sewage overflow problems, and associated impact on public health, appear to be the result of decisions made by Town of Ramapo public officials, not by any lack of warning or professional advice afforded them by Sewer District Engineers.

### III. RCSD COMMENTS TO TOWN OF RAMAPO PLANNING BOARD DRAFT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT LETTER DATED 5/9/03

When the draft environmental impact statement done for the Ramapo Master Plan was completed, it was submitted to the RCSD for their comments.

In a reply letter to the Town of Ramapo Planning Board, the following comments were made by RCSD engineers:

1. Not enough information was given to make an intelligent decision and calculate estimated additional flow for certain areas.
2. The changes in zoning, as proposed, for certain areas, will increase the building density in their respective areas and result in higher quantities of sewage flowing into district sewers that for which the system was designed.
3. The DGEIS does not address the impact of the comprehensive plan on existing sewage collection and treatment facilities. The existing collection system may not have adequate capacity to handle the anticipated increase in flow due to the aforementioned changes in zoning. The practice of increasing density and consequently sewage flows from properties within the District may lead to an overload of the Sewer District's facilities in the future.

This is clearly a warning to the Town of Ramapo from the RCSD that the effect on the sewer system was not considered in the draft impact statement for the development of the Master Plan, and that the existing sewers may not be able to handle the increased flow from the changes in zoning density.

#### Key Points

1. The RCSD stated that this letter was merely a response to the **draft** impact statement.
2. The RCSD was unaware of the official response from the Town of Ramapo concerning these concerns.
3. At the time of the meeting, the RCSD was unaware of the content of any further correspondence, comments, or data presented to or from the RCSD or the Town of Ramapo in response to these concerns.
4. It was suggested that these concerns would have to be addressed and detailed in a question and answer format in a **final** impact statement on public display in the library.
5. The RCSD did not know if any changes were made to the Master Plan, in consideration of these comments made by the RCSD.

#### IV. TOWN OF RAMAPO MASTER PLAN

Days after the meeting with the RCSD, we became aware of a document known as the Findings Statement.

The Findings Statement, prepared by the Town of Ramapo, is a summary of significant conclusions reached during the preparation of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the Town of Ramapo Comprehensive Plan.

The purpose of the Findings Statement is to examine more closely, questions raised during the plan review, which were stated to be the adequacy of the water supply, sewage collection system, and the effect on traffic.

I have recently requested additional information from the RCSD to further investigate this area of concern, and the information should be available shortly. This information may have an effect on the conclusions detailed herein.

We have examined the Findings Statement, and based on the information currently available, have concluded the following:

##### **Key Findings**

1. There was *no independent review* of the impact of sewage flows and adequacy of the sanitary sewer system resulting from zoning changes recommended in the Ramapo Master Plan. Outside consultants *were* utilized, however, to assess the impact on traffic and drinking water supply.
2. With regard to the issue of sewer capacity, zoning increases were justified by the Town with a statement made by Mr. Ron Delo, former Executive Director of the RCSD. The conclusion was "*Sewage collection facilities have the capacity to handle the projected flows.*"
3. It is not known what information or method was used to make this determination, which is in sharp contrast to the conclusions drawn earlier by the RCSD in the review of the Draft Generic Environmental Impact Statement.

We are currently waiting for supporting data to investigate these findings more fully.

4. With regard to the capacity of the sewage system, the Town of Ramapo, as lead agency in the consideration of the Master Plan, was responsible for initiating the process, judging what concerns were legitimate, responding to those concerns and ultimately approving the master plan, with no independent review and approval.

## V. SEWAGE OVERFLOWS

The RCSD suspects that in-leakage of rainwater into the system at leaky manhole covers is the primary reason for the overflows, and that the sewer system is not undersized.

They state that the Ramapo Interceptor *can* handle the flow, and that there is only a problem when it rains. Therefore, development is not the problem

Sewer District engineers are now walking through the sewer easements to find areas where puddles may be forming and entering the manholes.

The RCSD is spending time and money now to stop the rainwater infiltration, and that once all the manholes are properly sealed, this will help solve the problem.

The District suspects that the capacity of the siphon in the interceptor may be the weakest link, and the reason that the flow is backing up during heavy rain events. They will therefore investigate the capacity of this section first to determine if this is indeed the bottleneck.

The RCSD states that the hydraulic model of the Ramapo Interceptor should be completed in the next 6 - 12 months. This will provide information to determine capacity.

### Key Findings:

1. The RCSD has no idea of the existing flow in the Ramapo Interceptor. No flow measurement has been done.
2. The RCSD does not know how much flow the Ramapo Interceptor can theoretically handle. This will be determined by a hydraulic model, scheduled to be developed in the next 6 -12 months.
3. There is no procedure in place to determine the effectiveness of manhole sealing, what percent of total sewage flow is rainwater, and what percentage is base sewage flow. This could be determined by flow measurement. There are no current plans to measure flow.
4. Sewage capacity is judged to be adequate by visually looking into the manhole.

The RCSD states that the Ramapo Interceptor **can** handle the flow based on the fact that when the manhole is opened, visual inspection shows that the line is not flowing full.

## **VI. ILLEGAL HOOKUPS OF SUMP PUMPS**

The RCSD acknowledges that illegal hookups to the system do exist.

### **Key Findings**

1. There is no program or procedure in place that would allow any accurate determination of the number of illegal hookups to be made.
2. Such a program would be the responsibility of the Town of Ramapo, not the RCSD, since the illegal hookups would be made to the 8" diameter lateral sewers, not the interceptor.
3. The RCSD feels that such a program could not be implemented, since it may be illegal to demand entrance to private residences to inspect for illegal hookups.
4. The sewer district has used smoke testing in the past, but this is of little value because people know that if they install a trap in the illegal hookup, the smoke will not enter the house, making detection impossible with this method.

## **VII. DEVELOPMENT IN SLOATSBURG**

1. Development in the Village of Sloatsburg will not affect Airmont and the capacity of the Ramapo Interceptor. All flow from that development will be routed to a new sewage treatment plant to be built in Sloatsburg.
2. There is no plan currently in place to route a portion of flow now entering the Ramapo Interceptor to the new sewage treatment plant.

## **VIII. FOIL REQUEST DISCREPANCY**

1. The RCSD sewage states that the discrepancy in information received within multiple foil requests is due to clerical error.

Responses to the FOIL requests are prepared by the office staff at 4 Route 340 in Orangeburg.

Depending upon how the spill information is filed by locality, the information may not be included in a specific request.

Example: Spills in Airmont may be filed under Monsey, or spills in Monsey may be filed under Spring Valley or Airmont.

## **IX. RCSD OPINION ON DEVELOPMENT**

1. The RCSD states that they have no opinion on the proliferation of high-density housing projects in Ramapo and the capability of the existing sewer system to handle the flow.

## **X. FINES FOR SEWAGE SPILLS**

1. The RCSD is fined for sewage spills only if the DEC determines that the RCSD was responsible for the spills.

Normally occurring, unavoidable spills do not result in fines being imposed.

## **XI. PUMP STATIONS / REMOTE OVERFLOW SENSORS**

The pump station telemetry systems transmit alarms on a 24/7 basis to the treatment plant in Orangeburg, monitoring wet well level and equipment failure.

Some data gathering functions were lost as a result of Y2K problems.

1. The RCSD states that the function lost was the amount of time the pumps are running. This was not deemed to be significant to flow determination, since the pumps are variable speed drive (output varies), and it is known that the actual pump run time is nowhere near the level that would be considered problematic.