

**Public Hearing on Proposed 2019 Sewer Rates held December 10, 2018 at 5:30 P.M. at the Town**

**Hall in Schroon Lake N.Y.**

**Present:**

**Town Supervisor:** Michael Marnell

**Councilpersons:** Roger Friedman, Don Sage, Meg Wood and Clara Phibbs

**Town Clerk:** Patricia Savarie

**Also Present:** Ethan Thompson, Paul Leah, Marion Weaver, Mark Granger, Sally DeLiberato, Cheryl and John Fear, Jared Whitley, Sally Gebensleben, Randy Garrison, Barry Pitkin, Larry Graziano, David Peterson, Glen Repko, Lori Decker, Brooke Clark, Tom and Jean Schuhle, Dan and Deb Gorke, Matt Curren, Julia Pitkin Shantz, Linda Osterman, Debbie Donaldson, Kevin Kelly, Sue Palisano and Bob Claus

Supervisor Marnell called the meeting to order 5:30 P.M. and asked the Town Clerk, Patricia Savarie to read the Public Hearing Notice. Supervisor Marnell stated please state your name and you will be given three minutes to speak.

Town of Schroon  
will hold a Public Hearing on the  
Proposed 2019 Sewer Rates  
and Increase of \$260.00 annually per unit  
on December 10, 2018 at 5:30 P.M.

Larry Graziano stated that it looked like the increase was 40% is that true? Councilwoman Wood stated it was about 39%.

Jon Fear asked the Board how did you come up with this figure and what was the thought process? Supervisor Marnell stated that the fund balance for the Sewer Budget is very low and there is not enough funds to get through the year without increasing the unit price.

Councilman Friedman stated that what this raise does is to meet the 2019 Sewer Budget, there is no other place to take it from. In the General Fund you can take something out for the Golf Course, Parks the Beach but Water and Sewer they are solely dependent upon themselves. You can't take from another fund that has more money. In March our Sewer Treatment Plant Operator, Jim Roblee, came to us and it was a wake up call as to where we are. We knew that the need to increase units had been there for years, it is very difficult to do, because we do not have the funds to expand and there are not to many people in town that want town sewer, even if they need it because they don't want to pay for it.

Cheryl Fear stated we were away in March so there wasn't another meeting on this. You as a Board were not transparent enough to the community. You could of sent a letter out to the Sewer

Customers to communicate as to what was going on and you should of done that as a Board. My question is why was the decision made to only increase the 602 units, because clearly you can not get more units, we don't have an option so why is that dedicated to a small group of people versus looking for a way to pass that expense on to the entire community? Supervisor Marnell stated it is not legal to charge someone outside the Sewer District. For example when Drakes Restaurant needed to put in a private sewer system they spent thousand of dollars to put it in, so you can not charge someone who is not in the district. Cheryl Fear asked so if I want off of it, I can put in my own well and septic? Supervisor Marnell stated no not if you are in the district.

John Fear stated what is the plan for the future and how can we minimize this in the future? Jim Roblee stated you are a prime example of a lot of the added expenses. We have residence here that are gravity fed and it goes right to the plant so there is no added expense. Your sewer has to be pumped so there is an added cost, but you are not charged for it, you pay a flat rate just like everyone else. Yours is also a very unique situation because you are one of the last lines in the brook on the old main put in 1934 and we have been ordered by the state to move that line. That means we will have to put a pump station in your line just to handle your service, it will cost us \$32,000.00 that your neighbors are going to have to pay for. You have to look at everything, its more fair if you know whats going on. John stated he agreed with him and that the kind of thing, that needs to be put out there for the public to understand. Jim stated this is the problem we are having because we have numerous areas in Town where we have deeded right aways and we have people disregard them so it makes it more difficult for us to get in where we need to be and if there is a problem the state will only allow us a certain amount of time or there is a fine of \$37,500.00 a day, so we try to do it as quickly as we can and avoid that, but everybody works against us, these are all things that cost. I can give you an example we have a place here in Town that I have to check everyday to check their man hole and clean them out which cost \$420.00 a month just keep track of that one place until they do some upgrades. There are many of these systems in the district which cost us money. These cost I have discussed with the Board over the past 5-6 years. My personnel opinion, it should have been increased \$50.00 a year so it didn't happen all at once, but I don't make those decisions.

John Fear stated we are at that junction now and we need to know what to do in the future. Supervisor Marnell stated you can not charge outside the District, many people outside the District spend thousands of dollars upgrading there private sewer systems. John stated that it is about the lake and the environment everyone benefits from it. It would take some kind of assessment to get everyone to pay. Lets get a plan together and see what has to happen in the future. Most of us didn't know this

was going to happen and that it was a issue because we haven't done anything about it for the past five years. Now we know so lets have and educated discussion on this and what the reality's are, I think people just want to know. Supervisor Marnell stated we should of probably done more advertising on this so the public knew. Year after year it was discussed, but we didn't do anything.

Darren Woods stated he was not in the Sewer District but lived on the lake for 20 years and would be fine paying for it because it is protecting the lake. Councilman Friedman stated we discussed this with Jim Roblee a couple of years ago and we did some research to see if other Towns had done this and we found nothing in New York State, not saying it cant be done and maybe its changing the game plan a little bit but I think that is one of the avenues we have to pursue because the sad thing is most of the time for a Town Board , there are many solutions, this one is not easy, it is expensive. The cost we are going with is the average around the state.

Jim Roblee stated that you need a time period right now because now the plant is at the age where you will need to replace things over the next five years depending on what the state requires. We have had to hire and train another operator because I retire next year and they may need to hire another one. Supervisor Marnell stated the operational cost and maintenance is way beyond what we anticipated.

Sue Palisano stated there maybe away to do a combination of things and increase in the taxes that are levied to folks in the Sewer District but then do a one time tax to everyone else who are not in the district, so maybe there is away of looking at it so we can close the deficit we are facing.

Sally Gebensleben stated to me it is just frustrating and I'm in shock that none of us knew. For me, a single female living in the district, I don't make a ton of money, I work hard and I can pay my bills but this is a huge increase and its a hardship. I always thought it was unfair, I use very little water compared to someone who washes everyday and only gets charged \$10.00 extra. I understand it is a big problem but it is frustrating that we are just finding out about it.

Linda Osterman stated I want to say something for the little guy, my water is turned off from November to April and I pay \$525.00 quarterly and it is very expensive and I'm single to. I just feel bad, I have always been happy to do my part and would like to expand my business to my cabins and it is very expensive. I'm here from Massachusetts tonight, when we bought our house nobody told us about the Water and Sewer Tax and we found out at the closing and having what we know now, we may have not bought it. It is a big bill.

Dave Peterson wanted to know what the total burden was within the whole Town. Is it 10% of the population that has to shoulder this cost? Jim Roblee stated at the last census we had 1,650

population and we have 602 units or 375 customers. Dave asked how many businesses are not on the system? Councilman Friedman stated that the District ends at Grove Point Road with one customer and starts at Olden Drive.

Jared Whitley asked how many water accounts compared to sewer accounts? Supervisor Marnell stated there are 602 units in Sewer and 1200 plus in Water.

Julia Pitkin Shantz asked when the pricing was developed and it was decided to be a flat rate for everybody, could we go back and look at it again and start from the bottom up and looking at the rates and see if there is a more equitable way to spread the cost? Councilman Friedman stated the reason it was done like that is so it did not punish the businesses in Town. In the Village of Lake George they measure economic success by the number of stuff they are receiving in their Waste water Treatment Plant. When the Plant is working at its maximum they know the Town is doing very well. If you have just a few businesses in Town and everyone goes away for the winter, you have very little usage, so the businesses who live here in the winter using water will shoulder the cost. Julia stated it doesn't make sense to have a flat rate for something where there is such a difference in the load that each of us is putting on the Sewer Plant. My nine units are putting zero burden on the Plant. It does not make sense to me that the fixed sewer cost should be divided by the number of units equally. I understand the usage rate but I don't understand why the fixed cost of the Sewer infrastructure should be burdened in the way it is. I feel people who use it more should bear the bigger cost of it to pay for the Sewer Plant because they are burdening it more. It seems like we have no growth in the number of sewer units. We are not doing a good job as a Town in spreading that burden among new businesses and homeowners, so there should be a different way to look at it. Supervisor Marnell stated this was not established by the old Town Board , they hired a consultant firm and maybe we need to do that at this time to review all these things. Councilman Friedman stated the Town board 20 years ago decided to blend the usage and units. Clough Harbor Engineering Firm told us if you just go with usage in a small town, your high usage businesses will take on a much greater Sewer debt and it would drive them out of Town. The most important concept is the cost is not going to go down and the driving force is, we have to make budget for the Sewer Districts and if don't you will not have sewer and then you wont have a business, unfortunately there is no fluff here. We can form a Committee with a blend to discuss and come up with a plan.

Dave Peterson asked is the reason you don't charge the people who are outside the district a legal issue? Supervisor Marnell stated yes, we can not do that.

Larry Graziano asked does the Sewer District actually have to provide an actual hook up to the

Sewer or can they provide other services which would allow the district to be expanded without incurring all the cost of hooking every last house up to the Sewer Plant? This is a big problem and it has to be addressed. Maybe if you provided taxpayers outside the district a service to improve their septic you could charge a fee to be part of the District and not provide the same service as you do in the District. There has to be some creativity to do something.

Jared Whitley asked what the deficit was last year in the Sewer District? Jim Roblee stated he thought around \$300,000.00.

Supervisor Marnell stated he liked the idea of a committee but I think it is necessary to have a representative from Clough Harbor Engineering and you can not have a big committee otherwise you are overburdened and don't get anywhere. We do have a Water and Sewer Re-Defining Committee already. Councilman Friedman stated yes but is time we start new and form a new committee.

Supervisor Marnell stated yes and we will contact a few engineering firms and talk to them and find one that best meets our needs. Councilman Friedman stated you don't have the money for an engineer right now. We need to start with a discussion and we have Jim and Bill who have more knowledge than any engineering firm and we are in good hands. Julia Pitkin Shantz asked who was going to take the lead on scheduling the first meeting and have a date and whats the next step? Councilman Friedman stated first we need an article in the paper looking for Sewer District people and spread the word if your interested.

Councilwoman Phibbs stated Mike I think you need to look into what needs to happen before we go off on a tangent. No disrespect to you all for your efforts but we need to look into what can be done legally and get our act together along with you all. Supervisor Marnell stated one question you had was, what can we do to make this a town wide sewer district and is it possible and what can we do to make it possible? As it stands now I don't think it is possible. Councilman Friedman stated I think Councilwoman Wood and myself should be on the committee as Board members since we are in the Sewer District, unless someone else would like to do it. Supervisor Marnell stated we will put the train in motion, it may be February or March. Councilman Friedman stated if you want to be on the Committee contact Councilwoman Wood or myself.

Councilwoman Wood moved to adjourn the Public Hearing at 6:25 P.M., seconded by Councilman Friedman; carried.

I, Patricia J. Savarie, do hereby certify the foregoing to be a true and correct transcript from the minutes now on file in my office and of the whole such original minutes.

Dated: December 13, 2018

\_\_\_\_\_ Town Clerk

