

Dear Supervisor DeMayo,

Please include the following article in the public comment period closing April, 27, 2021:

Liberty presents compromise plan for Swan Lake treatment plant

By Matt Shortall - editor

HANOFEE PARK — In what will prove one of the most consequential decisions in recent memory, the Town of Liberty moved a step closer toward a final plan to upgrade Swan Lake's 35-year-old Waste Water Treatment Plant.

Board members and Swan Lake residents have debated for the better part of a year on the size and scope of the proposed upgrade for a sewer district that covers 1.15 square miles and currently serves about 1,500 people.

The Town Board and Delaware Engineering presented a compromised plan during a socially-distanced public hearing held at Hanofee Park on Tuesday. Dave Ohman and Mary Beth Blanconi of Delaware Engineering were on hand to walk through the proposal and answer questions. An update to the treatment plant has been discussed for decades, but Delaware Engineering has been consulting with the town about the project since 2014.

Originally proposed to cost \$20 million and process nearly one million gallons per day (the current plant handles 425,000 gallons per day) a compromised plan costing \$18 million would increase plant capacity to 686,000 gallons per day as well as upgrade aging equipment and repair/build new facilities to adhere to stricter regulatory compliance

Besides seasonal capacity limitations the plant currently experiences, the Town Planning Board has already approved new developments that, when connected to the sewer system, will put the current plant at or over permitted capacity. Furthermore, Delaware Engineering says there is no room to accommodate future growth that will help spread the cost of maintaining and operating the sewer system throughout the district.

If approved, the \$18 million will come from a 30-year zero interest loan, which the town is eligible to receive through the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation's (EFC) hardship financing program.

"We have between now and December to complete our application and get it in or else we will lose eligibility," said Ohman.

Ohman said there are more than a dozen other waste water treatment plants throughout New York State that are also trying to secure zero percent financing.

"Hardship eligibility is a competitive process," Ohman said. "Everybody's going for this money."

According to numbers from Delaware Engineering, the sewer district upgrade is expected to raise annual sewer rates from \$840 to between \$1,536 and \$1,415. The town said it would try to mitigate costs by “aggressively pursuing” grants, including a potential \$4.5 million matching EFC grant.

Public comments

Earlier this year, a group of Swan Lake residents brought a lawsuit against the town to halt the \$20 million proposal they said would threaten Swan Lake's rural character and place too high a burden on taxpayers. A judge dismissed that case, but residents have still expressed their apprehension to a large-scale upgrade while admitting that the plant needs to be repaired and modernized.

“We in Swan Lake are a small community and we are living in Liberty, which is one of the highest taxed places in New York State,” said Swan Lake resident Bill Liblick, who urged the board to consider using another company besides Delaware Engineering.

“We have no true economic development and we're just talking about ‘what if?’ ... we're paying a lot of money and getting very little in services. I implore you to look in other areas as well to increase our tax base.”

Liblick urged those in attendance not to put too much faith in anticipation of future development or possible grants.

“Let's talk about reality,” he said.

Swan Lake resident Cora Edwards said, “It isn't right that current taxpayers have to foot the bill for future expansion when our own usage remains the same. Our tax bills are high enough already. It looks like ‘government by the developers and for the developers’ and all those who profit from it.”

Joel Rosenfeld is Executive Director of Camp Gila D'Bobov which sits just outside the Swan Lake Sewer District. Rosenfeld said they had to build their own treatment plant a few years ago.

“Had there been the opportunity to join the Swan Lake Sewer District, we would have gladly paid money to join and pay yearly fees,” Rosenfeld said.

Rosenfeld said he also owns property in Swan Lake that he's currently unable to develop.

“Here in the United States we have property rights. I have a property, I'm paying capital reserves even on vacant land and I can't get sewer if this project doesn't happen,” he said.

Swan Lake resident Nancy Levine said that “responsible development” is always welcome, but reiterated her concerns about development leading to increased traffic on Stanton Corner Road.

“If you come up Old White Lake Turnpike to turn onto Stanton Corner you're taking your life in your hands,” Levine said.

Public comments may be emailed to supervisordemayo@townofliberty.org up until Tuesday, April 27.

The town board is anticipated to review all public comments, reaffirm a negative SEQR declaration and adopt a bond resolution by May 3.