

“Sewer sprawl = Less clean water for all”

Promoting Sewer Extensions in Low Density & Rural Areas Is a Dirty Water Plan!!

What Is Happening: Special interest groups are promoting the use of these “septic surveys” in the new Ten Year Water and Sewer Plan to convert lots from septic systems to sewer service. The most egregious aspect is that properties are being recommended for sewer service that do not even have failed or potentially failing septic systems.

Why this matters: Once sewer service is made available, water quality and the environment inevitably degrade due to rezoning and higher density development. The resulting increased impervious surfaces promote increased stormwater runoff that degrades streams with sediment and contaminants. WSSC has already proposed a \$83M move of the Potomac Water Filtration Plant’s water intake to avoid stormwater-borne contaminants caused by sewer-enabled high-density development. We must, again, tell the County that clean drinking water matters!

Sewer Sprawl Threatens the Ag Reserve and Our Clean Streams

Tell the County Council that it must act to stop sewer sprawl at its Feb. 27 worksession on the Water and Sewer Plan:

At this Tuesday's worksession (2/27), Councilmembers must make these crucial edits to the Water and Sewer Plan:

(1) Base the septic area surveys and decisions on preventing, documenting, and addressing actual and imminent public health hazards.

(2) County (DPS and DEP) to begin immediately to educate property owners on septic, to support effective long-term maintenance of on-site systems.

What's at Stake?

* Neighborhoods on septic systems are in the Agricultural Reserve and its low-density buffer areas such as in Potomac, Boyds, Olney, Cloverly, and Damascus.

* Our cleanest streams and well-water drinking water supplies are in these same areas that are served with septic systems.

* Where sewer pipes go, urban development follows. In contrast, septic systems enable the Ag Reserve and its buffer neighborhoods to remain rural.

* County Master Plans and clean water commitments require us to maintain the Ag Reserve and its buffer areas with infrastructure (roads and sanitation systems) that are appropriate to rural and low-density areas - septic systems and rural roads, not sewer pipes and highways.

* If we allow sewer and highway project incursions into our low-density areas and the Ag Reserve itself, we will "lose the store" - we will wave goodbye to the clean water that these areas supply.

County Officials Are Helping Developers to Sprawl Sewer Pipes into the Ag Reserve and its Buffer Areas.

- * Current county government practice is to declare certain rural and low-density residential neighborhoods "septic problem areas," including properties with functioning septic systems and no failures.
- * A single homeowner phone call to DEP or DPS, or a DEP or DPS staffer action, can trigger a neighborhood to be declared a septic problem area.
- * The attached map shows current septic problem areas listed by DEP.
- * Once a problem area is triggered, homeowners living in that area may find their property included in a "septic area survey" and then listed by the County for sewer conversion.
- * Homeowners, not the County nor WSSC, pay for the costs of sewer conversion, which can be as high or higher than one hundred thousand dollars.

Sewer Sprawl puts a cloud over property values, and homeowners will pay the astronomical costs of sewer conversion.

- * If this current County government practice of recommending sewer conversions for properties with functioning septic systems continues, there will be a cloud of negative impact on homeowner property values and uncertainty of future use.
- * Factors used to declare problem areas and switch areas from septic to costly sewer pipes, such as trees in a yard and age of the septic system are not based on sound science.
- * Homeowners in neighborhoods targeted for septic problem area surveys are not told what their costs will be for switching to sewer pipes.
- * Homeowners, not the County or WSSC, bear the costs of switching to sewer pipes, and the costs can be astronomical.

What's the Solution to sanitation needs for low-density and rural areas?

- * Well-maintained on-site waste treatment systems including septic systems can function indefinitely with effective inspections and homeowner practices.
- * In contrast, the vast majority of County streams are degraded by sewer-enabled sprawl and polluted by leaking and overflowing sewer pipes.

To Stop Sewer Sprawl, At this Tuesday's worksession (2/27), Councilmembers must make these crucial edits to the Water and Sewer Plan:

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- (2) County (DPS and DEP) to begin immediately to educate property owners on septic, to support effective long-term maintenance of on-site systems.