

Cadillac News 3/5/2020

Study needs before acting on sewer authority updates

On Feb. 1, 2020 the Lake Mitchell Property Owners sent a letter to Clam Lake, Cherry Grove and Selma Township notifying them that three of the sewer authority board member's terms had expired and the board was illegally conducting business. We asked for a legal board with more property owner representation.

After a quickly called special meeting, articles and by-laws changed, restricting property owner representation, the same board was reinstalled, and the board members now have legal terms.

The reason given, township officials are the only ones that can be trusted to run the sewer authority fairly as property owners "may not wish to act in the best interest of the system." That is however exactly what the county and townships have done for years. Since January 2016 user fees have increased more than 125% and operating costs increased more than 55% without significant repairs to the system.

EGLE cited LMSA in 2017 for two overflows and found pump station 1B not sufficient in design, capacity, and operation. In December 2019 LMSA presented a proposal for a \$9.5 million project while there has been a sizeable fund available for a number of years that could have been used to have already corrected this problem. This fund currently at \$703,000 was not even mentioned until the property owners called attention to it.

The board continues to emphasize a 40-year-old system without mentioning the upgrades already completed.

Two of the five major lift stations have been upgraded for close to \$450,000. Many new pumps have been installed.

We agree that additional upgrades are needed. Why not use the money that is currently available to address EGLE's concerns and then commission an engineering study to see what the real cost would be to fix what is left.

David W. Stinger Cadillac

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Is \$9.5 million needed for LMSA?

I have become completely alarmed by the Cherry Grove Township sewer system management. The Lake Mitchell Sewer Authority (LMSA) has sent letters to residents regarding rate increases over the last few years, equal to about a 200% increase. The letters stated these increases were to “cover a deficit in 2015” and “replace and repair equipment in 2017.”

The LMSA hired a company called WadeTrim to manage the system, who have notified residents they are in process of securing a \$9.5 million loan to replace the infrastructure that we have just paid to “repair and replace” part of.

I am no mathematician; however, I can add. LMSA reports that there are about 400 pumps, nine lift stations, and three wastewater metering points. According to one letter from LMSA during 2014, two of the lift stations were replaced at a cost of about \$450,000, and 36 new grinder pumps were purchased in 2016 at about \$33,000. By my calculations, we need to replace seven more lift stations at a cost of about \$1.6 million and of course this would increase some due to inflation, so let’s just say that it would be \$2 million to be safe. Let us also be realistic in saying that there are about 364 grinder pumps that were not replaced yet and they replaced 36 in 2016 for about \$920 a piece. So maybe we could replace the other 364 pumps for around \$364,000 with inflation.

I think if we needed to spend a total of \$2.3 million and some change then maybe a \$9.5 million dollar loan for about 1,000 taxpayers to be burdened with is a bit excessive. Mentionable is that there are funds, about \$70K, in the budget that are not being used to gradually replace any equipment over time. Curious.

Michaela M. George Cadillac