

NVC is still wrestling with its sewer system

User fees to rise to \$549 annually

By Toni Mailloux

Despite the good news a month ago that the Northport Village Corporation, commonly referred to as Bayside, was not going to have to construct a new wastewater treatment plant, the village continues to struggle with utility issues.

The estimated cost for upgrading the present plant is around \$2 million and the design cost for that work is estimated at \$200,000. The utility department doesn't have \$200,000, according to the department's chairman, David Crofoot, who is also on the board of overseers. And it would cost \$13,000 a year for 28 years to pay the debt-service to borrow the funds for that design work.

Crofoot said the trustees have

been working with the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to establish priorities for upgrading the system. The first, which both agree on, is to fix the infiltration of stormwater into the system. If those sources can be found, Crofoot said, they can likely be fixed quite reasonably.

The second priority is to modify and upgrade the treatment plant.

The third is to replace or lengthen the outfall pipe from the plant

into the harbor. Currently, Crofoot said, the state wants a pipe that is more than 2,000 feet long, which overseers do not feel is necessary.

The fourth priority is to replace the old sewer pipes, which allow the infiltration of storm water. Crofoot said the estimated cost for that is \$700,000.

"If we don't want to have license violations, we must control the infiltration," Crofoot said.

In order to qualify for grant

funds, customers of the district must be paying 2 percent of their median income for sewer fees. Currently, the annual bill is \$505 per year, while 2 percent would mean an annual user fee of \$547.

"We feel we have to go up to \$547 per year," Crofoot said, referring to the utility committee. He said a public hearing has to be held but the overseers have the right to set the fee.

Crofoot said increasing the user

fee to \$547 would mean an extra \$11,500 from the 234 sewer users. He said the utility department would likely still be in the red for 2005 and definitely for 2006 but could be back in the black at the end of 2007 when one of the older bonds is paid off.

Crofoot said Rural Development is willing to loan Bayside up to \$1.5 million but "we can't afford the debt service. We don't need loan money, we need grant money."

Crofoot continued, "The good news is we don't have to build a \$6 million plant that we couldn't afford to operate but the bad news is they are trying to hold us to the consent agreement." Bayside's consent agreement with the state calls for the design work for a solution to its wastewater treatment plant issues to be completed in 2005.

Crofoot said it seems ridiculous to him to design something that can't be built for a few years.

The overseers voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the utility committee to increase the annual user rate to \$549 per year (so it can easily be divided by three for the trimester

building). A public hearing will be held on the issue in July.

Crofoot said he is meeting again with the DEP Friday and would like some other overseers to attend the meeting as well. He said his message to the state is that the 234 users of the sewer district don't have the money to even design the upgrade at this time. He said it will be late 2007 before the district has the money in hand to support a loan to do the design.

In other utility-related news, the overseers learned:

- if North Street is going to be dug up, new sewer pipes should be put down but the district doesn't have the money to do it now. The solution was to just grade the street for now;

- there were flow violations at the treatment plant in March and April ("a whopping violation");

- the cost to pump out the district's septic tanks was higher than expected due to the large volume;

- its utility superintendent

passed the state test to be certified to run the water district as well as the sewer department; and

- learned a problem was discovered with one of the valves put in during the phase 1 water project. Bayside had been ready to release most of the \$11,000 that it is holding back from the contractor but decided not to until the other new valves are checked.

In other action, the overseers:

- learned Northport has not responded to Bayside's request for some funds to cover the damage that was done to Main Street because the storm drains were not cleaned out in the fall;

- accepted the offer of overseer Mike Robbins to try to get some federal disaster funds for roads that were damaged from the 10 inches of rain in the past 30 days; and

- started working on their proposed budget for 2006, which will be presented for adoption by residents at the annual town meeting in August.