



**LIVINGSTON COUNTY, MICHIGAN**  
**OFFICE OF THE LIVINGSTON COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONER**

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# Memorandum

**To: Livingston County Board of Commissioners**  
**From: Michelle LaRose, Deputy Drain Commissioner**  
**Date: 8/11/2021**  
**Re: Reorganization of the Drain Department**

Honorable Commissioners:

On behalf of the Livingston County Board of Public Works (BPW), I am requesting a reorganization of the Drain Department that would include the addition of one full time employee to the sanitary sewer operation team in the form of an Assistant Wastewater Operator.

## BACKGROUND

The BPW, in conjunction with the office of the drain commissioner, is responsible for the operation and maintenance of numerous wastewater systems throughout the County. The Drain Commissioner serves on the BPW as the Director of Public Works. The breadth of responsibilities includes operation and maintenance of the following systems:

- **Livingston Regional Sewer System (LRSS)**

The LRSS provides sanitary sewer service to approximately 2,400 customers throughout Tyrone and Hartland Townships, and are served by 23 pump stations which convey waste into Genesee County to their District 3 Wastewater Plant. Approximately 60% of these customers are serviced by a grinder pump or septic tank effluent pump, which require onsite maintenance visits to each one of these properties. Utilizing state grant funding, a comprehensive asset management plan (AMP) was developed and adopted by the BPW. The AMP identifies preventative maintenance and long-term capital improvement needs over the next 10 years and will continue to be updated annually.

- **Issue:** *We cannot fully implement our AMP without additional staff. The SRS (see below) is requiring far more effort than originally anticipated, and it is becoming nearly impossible to rely on contractors for anything other than emergencies, or planned projects with a great deal of lead time. This presents us with few alternative options. In-house operations and increased automation are the main strategies we have available to us at the moment.*

- **Septage Receiving Station (SRS)**

The SRS was constructed in 2007 and was initially projected to accept 12 million gallons of septage. In 2020, the flows are projected to exceed 36 million gallons. This volume has created a number of issues for the Genesee County District 3 Wastewater Plant, and we were issued a corrective action plan to mitigate this issue. Despite the enormous success of the station, which one of our consultants' estimates is one of the busiest septage stations in the United States, we have maintained nearly identical staffing to what we started with when the station initially opened.

- ***Issue:** Since planning began on the expansion, our flows have increased more than 12 million gallons per year, with another 4-5 million anticipated from just one hauler. We will need to begin design of yet another expansion, and with it, discussions of alternate ways of handling biosolids in the future. Among 5 staff members, they have averaged 170 hours of overtime per month since January, with some individuals logging in nearly 100 hours of overtime in a single month. This has stretched our staffing to the breaking point and we urgently need to correct this since we are dealing in some cases with young families among our operators.*

- **Septage Dewatering Station (SDS)**

The SDS is currently in operation but is already overwhelmed due to the substantial increase in volume mentioned above.

- ***Issue:** We have begun looking at expansion of this facility to add an additional press in order to maintain compliance with our discharge permit with Genesee County. The amount of biosolids being generated from this facility is enormous (approximately 10-12 tons per day) and will continue to occupy more of our time, as volume expands.*

- **Community Wastewater Sites**

The Drain Commissioner's office is also responsible for the operation and maintenance of nine community wastewater systems spread throughout Livingston County. These systems are established as drainage districts through the Michigan Drain Code (Act 40 of 1956) and service nearly 200 customers. The systems include a variety of operational components such as grinder pumps, septic fields, and advanced filtration systems.

- ***Issue:** We are beginning to see more and more symptoms of failure on these systems as they continue to age. They are all beyond the average age of onsite wastewater systems and we anticipate some of these systems to fail in the coming years, necessitating their replacement. In the interim, we have devoted additional resources to monitoring and maintaining them in order to extend their lifespan to the extent possible.*

## **NEW POSITION DUTIES**

The job description for the Assistant Wastewater Operator is attached, and our intent is to utilize this position in order to provide critical operations support to our Wastewater Operators as we attempt to fully implement our operation and maintenance needs among our facilities located throughout the county.

**BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS RECOMMENDATION**

The BPW has extensively evaluated and discussed our operational needs based on our current systems, the addition of the Septage Dewatering Facility, and the implementation of maintenance and capital improvement projects identified in the LRSS asset management plan. The consensus of the board early last year was that more than one position was warranted. With the extent of the manpower needs now known with the new SDF facility, it has become clear that the second position is needed as well, and the BPW has instructed us to move forward with the request in order to meet these needs.

**BUDGET IMPLICATIONS**

The County would be fully reimbursed the cost of this position through the sanitary sewer system operating budgets.

Based on the information presented, we respectfully request passage of the attached resolution for reorganization of the Drain Department.