

Westchester eyes overhead sewers to combat flooding

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Even though the rains have gone, both the Westchester Village Board and its residents are still working hard to rebuild the village and find ways to prevent the disastrous flooding that occurred July 23.

"We had 3.5 inches of rain this morning and I think we were all sweating it out," said Village President Sam Pulia at the committee meeting Aug. 3. "There's nothing worse than having water in your house. Other towns have been able to find assistance for their residents so the question is, 'Why can't we?'"

Between 50 and 100 people filled the board room Aug. 3 looking for answers a week after the special town hall meeting and a week and a half following the storm. Since that time, the board has been laying down some ideas as to how to prevent this problem from happening ever again.

Pulia proposed installing an overhead sewer program, which he says other towns have had relative success with. Pulia also knows that after his neighbor tried installing an overhead sewer, he never got flooding again.

While other trustees approved of the overhead sewer system, however, they also felt the need to look at other ways to address the flooding.

"This past week we did a smoke test on 17 homes on Canterbury to find that their downspouts were going into the sanitary (sewers)," said Trustee Neil Boyle. "Before looking into overhead sewers, I think we need to fix the problem with the sanitary sewers."

Boyle said a smoke test involves dropping a smoke bomb into the sanitary sewers and if the sewer shows smoke coming out of it, it's illegally hooked up.

Trustee Walter Novak agreed with Boyle that the village needs to go after residents with illegal hook ups and in reference to an overhead sewer project, he said the village has to think about how much money they have.

"When we're talking about money, we don't want to give any resident a promise and say we can do it, when in fact, we can't do it," Novak said.

Finance Director Jim Egeberg said the village has between \$600,000 to \$800,000 in the utility fund to conduct such a project such as a proposed overhead sewer project.

Meanwhile, Pulia was in Washington D.C. yesterday to try to get immediate funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. He said all the necessary governmental

forms were mailed out today and that between 3,600 and 3,700 forms from Westchester residents of people asking for help are being sent to the county.

"This is far from over and I'm willing to go the extra mile to get the federal help," Pulia said.

For people like Mary Gerace of 811 Newcastle, she wants the flooding issue dealt with this summer.

"First you cry, then you deal with it. When the water is gone, it's not done. I do believe we have big problems. The overhead plan sounds great, but I don't think it's the only plan," Gerace said.

To add to the village's water issues, Westchester had a water main burst under Cermak Road and found that the pipe was from 1927. The cost of repair is between \$20,000 and \$25,000. According to John Fecarotta, water superintendant, the burst cost the village between \$3,000 and \$4,000 in lost water.