

Water Woes in Waterford: Residents Split on County Assistance Plan

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Waterford was once one of Loudoun's largest towns, with an industry powered by the flows of the Catoctin Creek. Today, water is in scarce supply for many residents of the historic village, but there's little agreement on how to address the concern. While the county provided residents with public sewer service in the 1970s, residents have always relied on their own private wells for water. In some spots of the village, residents have more than enough water for all their needs. In others, residents have barely any water at all. With a goal of helping their water-deficient neighbors, the owners of 51 parcels in March signed an application requesting the county government study whether water service could be provided through its Water and Wastewater Program, which provides utility service to communities plagued with inadequate water or sewer systems. But as county authorities consider moving forward with a study, some residents are having second thoughts about the idea. Tom Edmunds, a 24-year Waterford resident and former president of the Waterford Citizens' Association who did not sign the application, said residents first need to find out who needs water and what the options are before the village decides to install a "city-like" water system. He fears residents won't get a say in the outcome. "People were told you get another bite at the apple—you don't," Edmunds said. "Very clearly the county has said that's not true." Edmunds said many of the residents signed the application in "good community spirit" to help their neighbors who lack water, thinking they could "just back out" if they didn't want to pursue the program. Phil Paschall, a 37-year village resident and citizens' association member who also did not sign the application, said residents are generally unsure as to how many of their neighbors need water. He's heard numbers as low as three and as high as 15. "That's why we need more information," he said. "We need to know specifically who is having water problems [before the county implements its program]." Now, some of the signatories are redacting their names from the application. According to Scott Fincham, the environmental program specialist with the county's Department of General Services, three residents have done so thus far. Some residents are

hoping that enough withdraw their names to reduce the number of signers to less than 60 percent of the total number of community residents—the county’s required minimum when considering such applications.

A Challenging Situation' For Waterford Foundation

One signer choosing to keep its name on the application is the Waterford Foundation, which owns 13 properties in the village—only four of which have their own water supplies. Stephanie Thompson, the foundation’s executive director, said that like many residents, the foundation needs water. “It could be positive or negative—there’s a lot of concerns on both sides,” she said. Nine of the foundation’s properties are either not hooked up to a water source or have a limited supply. One of those properties is The Corner Store, which is now home to the Corner Store Studio floral design shop. The building shares a well with a neighboring property, but Thompson said it still doesn’t get enough water for the foundation to use the space to its fullest potential. Because of the absence of water on some of its properties, Thompson said the foundation can’t meet certain health department requirements, which means it can’t lease them out. “It’s a challenging situation for us to be in,” she said. “We don’t want to create division in the community [by keeping or removing the foundation’s name from the application].” Edmunds said it’s ironic that the foundation has fought for 75 years to preserve the historic character of the National Historic Landmark village, but that it has now signed an application requesting the county to look at installing a water system there—a water system he feels could welcome in development by providing developers with a consistent water supply. “I don’t understand why they don’t see it,” he said. Paschall said residents have identified up to 17 properties in the village that could be developed if the county were to install a water system there. He’s also concerned that a water system could adversely affect two perineal streams that run underneath Main Street, one of which runs directly under the historic Corner Store building.

Concerns Spark County Reassuranc

Supervisor Geary M. Higgins (R-Catoctin), who lives just outside the village, said that some of the concern stems from a lack of involvement among all village residents. “It appears from what I’ve heard that not everybody has been a part of the process, and those who have been hearing about it from the outside have been concerned about what’s going on,” he said. Higgins

said that some residents also are concerned about the boundary lines of a potential water service area that residents drew up when submitting the application—boundaries that include the properties of some residents who weren't involved in the mapping process. Higgins also noted concern that if the county installs a water system in the village, it might be “overly burdensome” on residents if only a few of them are included. “That’s what public utilities are all about—to spread the cost out over a larger demographic so that no individual is buried by it,” he said. On May 7, the Waterford Citizens’ Association also voted to form a Water Committee to review the village’s water concerns and provide residents with more detailed information on the matter. Paschall said the committee’s work could prepare residents for a resubmission to the county in the next year or so. “That’s why we all at the citizens’ association meeting all voted to do that, so that maybe next year the application could work,” he said.

Waterford Citizens’ Association President Christy Hertel said the organization “is not actively involved in the application or the water issue.” Fincham said it’s too early to address the details of what could happen if the county approves the village’s application for a feasibility study. He said that if the county approves the application, which could happen as early as the end of June, the county would work not only with Loudoun Water, the agency that would manage the study, but also with the residents to develop a scope for the study that addresses Waterford’s needs and identifies potential solutions. For now, Fincham said the county is combing through Waterford’s application to ensure there’s enough evidence of water deficiency to move forward with a feasibility study. “We’re moving along really well on this one,” he said. The county is also handling a similar process in the village of Paeonian Springs. The village in 2017 submitted a Water and Wastewater Program application, seeking help with both water and sewer service. Fincham said Loudoun Water is now conducting that study and that county staff is hoping to have it wrapped up sometime this summer. The county also is working to help the village of Howardsville, where homes still lack running water. Dennis Cumbie, the division manager for the county’s Water and Environmental Programs, said the county in May located a site to install a wastewater system there and that staff is now working with Loudoun Water on the design. That project is not being done through the county’s Water and Wastewater Program, though.

