



The Chairman's Corner

by

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SEWER PROJECT

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In the early part of the 2010s, Columbia County came under a New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Order on Consent to evaluate the existing county wastewater treatment facility and make necessary improvements to the discharge permit limits.

Several years later, the DEC issued another Order on Consent, this one calling on the county to evaluate an alternative to the existing facility that would include the full replacement of the existing wastewater treatment facility, or to discharge its effluent to another wastewater treatment facility. This Order on Consent also provided for a timeline to implement the improvements.

At the heart of the issue was finding a permanent solution that solved the sewage issue at the Gerald R. Simons Commerce Park on Route 66 in Ghent. It was a daunting task yet an imperative one – the old treatment plant had clearly reached the end days of its useful life span, on top of which there was the DEC consent order. There was also a smaller wastewater treatment plant at the Columbia County Airport – older than the one at Commerce Park – that also came under the DEC consent order. In addition, maintenance costs for the plants were increasing as a result of their age.

If the county did nothing, which was clearly not an option, the DEC consent order had the potential of imposing large fines on a daily basis.

I'm happy to now say that following much hard work and ingenuity, a solution is in place and complete. And not simply a solution for the immediate future, but for years down the line as well.

The Board of Supervisors Public Works Committee, chaired by Stuyvesant Town Supervisor Ron Knott, was tasked at the outset with exploring the issue and ultimately coming up with a remedy.

There was, of course, the option of simply replacing the old treatment plant – at an estimated cost of \$4.5 million -- and replacing it with new. Another idea was to install individual septic for everyone involved, however, DEC wouldn't allow it, despite some thoughts that it looked like a good plan.

The way things evolved, it became clear that to simply replace the old plants would, obviously, put the county in the position of remaining in the treatment business. This, pointed out Supervisor Knott several years ago, "would carry with it ongoing operational costs of \$162,000 per year. We could bond the project for 25-30 years, but that's when you arrive at the end of the life expectancy for the plant, putting us back to square one. Furthermore, in that scenario, we would remain at the mercy of the DEC."

Next time, I'll outline how the project ultimately came to fruition.