

TOWN OF PROVINCETOWN - BOARD OF SELECTMEN

EMERGENCY MEETING – MONDAY, JULY 6, 2009

26 ALDEN STREET

Chairman Michele Couture convened the emergency meeting at 5:00 PM noting the following Board of Selectmen attending: Michele Couture, David Bedard, Mary-Jo Avellar, Elaine Anderson, and Austin Knight

The Board of Health members attending: Duane Gregory, Mark Phillips, Jerry Anathan, Ken Janson, Dr John Livingstone

Other attendees: Town Manager Sharon Lynn; Assistant Town Manager David Gardner; Police Chief Jeff Jaran; Director of Public Works David Guertin; Deputy Director of Public Works Sandy Turner; Health Agent Jane Evans; Health & Environmental Affairs Manager Brian Carlson, Rob Adams, AECOM, Bill Burke, Woodward & Curran; Paul Roux, Woodward & Curran, State Representative Sarah Peake.

Recorder: David Gardner

The following are meeting minutes, in brief:

The Town Manager Sharon Lynn made the following statement:

The Town of Provincetown's sewer system has been operating under emergency conditions since Saturday, July 4 at 9:30 a.m. when a low vacuum alarm was first detected, and notifications were made to on-call personnel who directly responded. Regular routine protocol was followed where two employees of Woodward and Curran immediately began to investigate the problem areas in the east end between Angel Foods and 573 Commercial St. Leaks were first detected in the east end of town, with additional vacuum failures occurring and spreading to the west end, making it very difficult to accurately identify one specific cause of the problem.

Quickly compounding the growing problem was the amount of people in town for the holiday weekend, and those individuals coming into town for the day to spend time viewing the parade which was to begin at 11:00 a.m., and also remained in town to watch the fireworks scheduled that evening. By the time the parade started at 11:00 a.m. the workers assigned to find the problems had to suspend their search operation until the parade concluded at approximately 12:00 p.m. After the parade, and throughout the afternoon, it was determined that the sewer system was losing vacuum pressure at both the west end and the east end of town. This increased the magnitude of the problem, and Woodward and Curran's wastewater superintendent was summoned and immediately responded arriving at approximately 5:30 p.m. By the early evening hours buffer tanks located in the east and west ends were beginning to overflow, affecting residents and business owners with septic back-ups in low lying areas of the system. Again, due to the compounding issues of the holiday, having over 50,000 people in Town using the system and the inability to quickly find the root of the problem, the system was unable to be cleared.

James Roderick Septic was already on stand-by alert and his two pumper trucks were dispatched to town. This began an around-the-clock series of pumpings throughout town into the night of July 4th, and into the morning hours of Sunday, July 5th. Early Sunday morning I directed Deputy DPW Director Sandy Turner to call-in the troops, so to speak, and at least five additional town employees responded to assist the efforts of Woodward and Curran employees.

By Sunday afternoon one line was up and running, but key equipment failures were surmounting in the valve pits causing additional employees from Woodward and Curran to be dispatched to Provincetown with additional equipment. Woodward and Curran employees, Department of Public Works personnel, engineers from AECOM (formerly Metcalf and Eddy), and contracted septic haulers have been working around the clock in an attempt to remedy this emergency situation while pumping areas that have been overflowing with additional pumper trucks made available by Robert B. Our Company.

Early this morning, on Monday, Dyer Street, from Bradford St. to Commercial St., was closed to traffic due to a possible break in the main. Engineers are convinced that there is a leak and Dyer Street has been isolated. Things are progressing but problems are still persisting. It is important to know that progress is being made but it is a deliberate

and slow process.

For those of you who have had property damage, or have been displaced from your homes, or have had to displace others, please report these incidents to your insurance companies. It is important that you, the property owner, file a prompt claim whether or not you will be covered. Also, if this is not a covered claim, please obtain receipts for any damage and clean up efforts and displacement costs, and submit them to my attention. My intention is to cover the costs of reasonable expenses incurred, and we will be sorting this out in the ensuing days and weeks.

We have notified the federal and state authorities. I have been in contact with the Environmental Protection Agency, and Mr. Guertin has been in close contact with the MA DEP regional director. We have closed the beaches as a precautionary measure, until results of testing which was completed earlier today, are known by tomorrow morning.

Town Hall offices were staffed today and phone calls were promptly taken. Both the DPW Director and Deputy DPW Director have been staffing the phones in this building all day and they will continue to do so until 11:00 p.m. tonight. After hours the 24 hour emergency line will be active for any complaints at 508-487-5474.

At 9:00 a.m. this morning I held a meeting with all key personnel involved in this emergency. I spent the first 45 minutes of this meeting addressing communication and the lack of it, over the course of the weekend. I recognize that we must improve to get the word out as quickly as possible, and to have a strategy to field questions. We will continue to advance in this direction.

Rob Adams gave an update on the progress of identifying and repairing the leaks. At this time, it appears that there was a break in the line on Dyer Street causing a vacuum pressure failure on the east end, and then throughout the system, causing overflows from manholes throughout. Pumping operations will continue through the night.

Brian Carlson and Jane Evans reported closure of the town beaches as a precautionary measure until proper water quality tests can be ascertained.

Board of Selectmen:

Mary-Jo Avellar - Complained that the Selectmen were not notified sooner. Concerned about how property owners are going to be compensated.

Elaine Anderson - Concerned about the communications failure around the situation.

Michele Couture - Concerned that there need to be safeguards created in the system to ensure that this does not happen again, especially in the height of season.

Austin Knight - We need a plan to identify how to upgrade the system to prevent this problem from reoccurring.

Board of Health Comments

Duane Gregory - Wondering whether this was malicious destruction. The timing of the event prevented the contractors from finding the break in a timely manner before it snowballed.

Mark Phillips - Was the proper protocol followed by staff on the clean-up within the public streets?

We need to sanitize the streets.

John Livingstone - The methodology of the clean up should take into consideration the water quality of the harbor.

Public Comments

- Sewage in the street. Who should we call? We need a communication plan. We need a concerted effort between the business community and the town in terms of communicating.
- The community needs to be notified. When didn't we know what happened?
- Communication structure within town government. Town staff should not be on holiday when the town is in high season.

- Ensure that the Town Manager and community get notified as soon as the alarm goes off. We need to fix the problem this morning and move forward.
- We need to do damage control with the press. We need to clean up Commercial Street.
- We can't avoid the press. The story gets ahead of us.
- What do I do if I back up again?
- Call DPW (not Roderick) directly because we will coordinate the work.
- Can a town flyer be produce to inform everyone to reduce water usage until we can identify and correct the problem?
- How many people are diagnosing the problem and can we get help from the State?
- Need to know exactly what we need from the state, and what kind of resources we can expect from the state.
- What oversight is occurring over the contract engineers to ensure that they are responding correctly to this situation?
- Wants to see the Selectmen take decisive action in the future.
- Prepare surety bond on claim against the engineer.
- Will correcting the leak at Dyer fix the west end as well?
- List of clients that use this system?
- This vacuum system was the only option we had when we installed the sewer system because of the unique nature of Provincetown. Phase III is a gravity system, and would not compound the vacuum system problem, but in fact, remove much of the demands placed on the East End of the system. In order to address the river flowing down the street, you need to bring in more pumper trucks. We need to identify either an electronic or mechanical device to warn us and pinpoint the location of a leak in the future.
- How many previous breaks within the system have occurred?
- Re-emphasize that it is not ok to walk through these spills in the street and that we need to get them cleaned up as soon as possible.
- We need to get a press release out that says we are open to the public. We need more pumper trucks.
- We should use the school's shower facilities for our tourist.
- Water conservation posting to be sent to all the guest houses.
- There is a clean-up protocol for the streets.
- Need to reach out to the disabled and elderly community.
- We need to call in more help.
- We need to be cleaning the streets immediately.
- Town's restrooms have not been closed.

The Board of Health adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Motion to adjourn by David Bedard at 6:50 p.m.

Minutes transcribed by: Vernon G. Porter, Secretary to Board of Selectmen
July 20, 2009

