

## **Sewer plant expansion is necessary**

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**By Paul Nelson, chairman of ALASD**

### **Alexandria, MN**

The Alexandria Lake Area Sanitary District (ALASD) is in the process of making a major capital improvement at our wastewater treatment facility. The improvement includes the provision of increased treatment capacity to accommodate growth, along with the replacement and renovation of equipment that is 30 years old and is approaching the end of its anticipated useful life. As part of this process, the removal efficiency of the facility will be dramatically improved.

The expansion of the wastewater treatment plant is absolutely essential to the continued development of the Alexandria area. ALASD has spent a great deal of time and careful study in evaluating the need for this expansion. The study phase of this project involved an extensive review of all aspects of this work, including a number of detailed presentations to a citizens' committee with representatives from the city, area townships, the lake association and others. The conclusion of our analysis is clear. The treatment facility is now at capacity. The expansion is necessary and the time to begin this work is now.

ALASD has demonstrated a strong commitment to the protection of the environment through years of dedicated work. We have worked diligently at making our facility the best it can be and have voluntarily conducted numerous and continual water quality studies and sampling programs. We are currently in the process of completing an extensive environmental review process with the state of Minnesota as part of the permitting of the proposed expansion.

During this process a number of inaccurate and misleading comments have been made regarding this project that are in need of a balanced and thoughtful response.

••Approving the proposed NPDES permit will result in uncontrolled future discharges.

Fact: The proposed NPDES permit will expire in five years. At that time a new permit will be issued. That permit may be more restrictive than the previous permit. The permit may be reopened at any time by the MPCA and more restrictive limits or controls may become effective. Additionally, the proposed permit only increases the permitted average annual daily flow to 3.800 m.g.d, not 4.700 m.g.d. Minn R. 7001.0150, subp.3, item B says "the issuance of a permit does not prevent the future adoption by the MPCA of pollution control rules, standards, or orders more stringent than those now in existence and does not prevent the enforcement of these rules, standards or orders against the Permittee."

••A more restrictive limit than 1 mg/L for total phosphorus is needed to protect downstream water bodies.

Fact: From 1977 to the present the design criteria of the existing treatment facility for total phosphorus concentration is 1 mg/L. Yet in recent years the treatment facility, at current flow levels, treats and discharges total phosphorus at a concentration of 0.33 mg/L or approximately 33 percent of the design criteria. Under the approved ALASD Facility Plan the design criteria used for the expanded facility is a discharge concentration not to exceed 0.30 mg/L for total phosphorus. As has been the case for each of the last 28 years the ALASD intends to remove phosphorus to below the design criteria. We expect that the expanded treatment facility will

operate at a phosphorus concentration of no more than 0.20 mg/L. Predictive modeling indicates no measurable adverse impact on downstream water bodies.

- The ALASD should volunteer or agree to a more restrictive permit limit for total phosphorus?

Fact: Under the anti-degradation provisions of the Clean Water Act, once a more restrictive limit is in place it may never be made less restrictive. Additionally, a more restrictive limit dramatically increases the probability of a permit violation that may result in fines and/or other penalties. To meet a permit limit, 99 percent of the time it is necessary for a facility to discharge the regulated pollutant at a concentration substantially below the permit limit. Lastly, a more restrictive limit may prevent future growth even though no adverse environmental impact would result from this growth. The disadvantages to the community of a more restrictive limit far outweigh the advantages.

- Under the proposed NPDES permit the ALASD treatment facility would be allowed to discharge 9,000 lbs. of phosphorus annually.

Fact: The existing NPDES permit allows the discharge of 9,000 lbs. of phosphorus. This mass-loading limit for phosphorus will continue to apply to the new NPDES permit. However, in year 2005 the district discharge of phosphorus was only 2,046 lbs. The district phosphorus loading has never exceeded 4,400 lbs. and has continued to trend downward to current levels, even as flow has increased. The proposed NPDES permit says the district “shall at all times properly operate and maintain the facilities and systems of treatment and control...” Our treatment facility cannot comply with this permit requirement and at the same time discharge 9,000 lbs. of phosphorus annually.

- Treatment facility expansion will result in more phosphorus entering downstream lakes.

Fact: This statement may be accurate depending upon the selected time period. In 1976 over 22,000 lbs. of total phosphorus was discharged from the two city owned treatment facilities into Lakes Agnes, Winona and Henry. In 1979 the discharge from the new ALASD treatment facility was 3,800 lbs. and in 2005 that discharge was reduced to 2,046 lbs. At the same time the annual average daily flow increased from 0.900 m.g.d. to 2.700 m.g.d. This dramatic reduction in phosphorus loading occurred concurrent with a three-fold increase in flow. We do expect with continued growth the phosphorus loading will increase over time to approximately 3,500 to 4,000 lbs./year. However, the predictive modeling of our environmental consultant does not indicate an adverse effect on downstream water bodies.

- The ALASD will not perform testing of downstream water bodies.

Fact: The ALASD has performed voluntary testing of area lakes for over 25 years. Over \$300,000 has been spent in the study of downstream water bodies since 1993. ALASD testing of downstream water bodies will become more extensive over the next five years with additional refinement in predictive modeling. However, the testing will not be as extensive or as expensive as that proposed by the Lake Le Homme Dieu Association.

- Plant expansion must be delayed until the Lake Winona TMDL Study is completed.

Fact: The MPCA may place a more restrictive limit in the NPDES permit as a result of the Lake Winona TMDL Study. The proposed NPDES permit says the district facility “may be required to comply with additional permits. Or permit requirements, based on the conclusions of any applicable US EPA approved total maximum daily load (TMDL) studies and their

implementation plans. This lake is scheduled to undergo a TMDL study beginning in 2006 and continuing for approximately 3-5 years.”

- Annandale Maple Lake Case decided by Appeals Court applies to the ALASD.

Fact: The Annandale Maple Lake Case specifically applies to a new discharge. The ALASD facility is not a new discharge. The appeals court also stated in their opinion that the phosphorus mass loading limit into an impaired water body cannot increase. The ALASD is not requesting an increase in the mass-loading limit. Lastly, based upon MPCA testimony that was not supported by fact, the appeals court determined that the new discharge would contribute to an existing impairment. No such determination has been made in regard to the ALASD discharge by the MPCA. Clearly, the ALASD expansion does not even meet one of these criteria.

- ALASD stands to gain \$6 million from the CLRSD for the plant expansion.

Fact: Under the law the ALASD is not allowed to profit from the provision of contract service. However, the ALASD cannot give away capacity or service. Therefore, the ALASD may sell plant capacity, but only for the actual cost of constructing that capacity. There is no service contract with the CLRSD to provide wastewater treatment service. There is a non-binding letter of intent that was issued for the sole purpose of expediting the CLRSD grant/loan approval process.

- District permitted flow will increase from 3.75 to 4.75 m.g.d.

Fact: The current annual average flow is 2.712 m.g.d. The Phase I expansion annual average day design flow is 3.800 m.g.d. The average wet weather design flow (AWWF) will increase from 3.750 to 4.750 m.g.d.

- Expansion will result in more growth.

Fact: The reason for the facility expansion is to ensure that the existing facility will be prepared to treat increased wastewater flow to meet regulatory limits and protect the environment. The increased flow is the result of community growth. This growth is beyond our control.

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