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Attention: Chair – Representative Maida Townsend
Montpelier, Vermont 05602

Water and wastewater system i.e. water utility basics.

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Vermont Rural Water Association (VRWA) is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit association based in Essex Junction, Vermont. VRWA has been in business since 1982 (formerly known as Northeast Rural Water Association) and the association mission is to promote public health and a clean environment by providing support to public water and public wastewater systems.

The majority of public water and wastewater systems are not specifically defined as a utility district but they operate and provide services within a defined service area. The operations are managed and controlled by a town or city, fire district, or village as examples. The water systems for these entities are generally defined as community systems – at least 15 service connections and or 25 persons served more than 60 days / year. In Vermont there are 425 +/- community public drinking water systems. Public water systems receive a permit to operate from the Vermont DEC Drinking Water and Groundwater Protection Division.

Wastewater systems, defined here as those serving a community and treating wastewater product at a facility also have a permit for operations. The permit is issued via the guidance of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES). A given wastewater system is issued a permit for operations from the VT DEC Watershed Management Division. There are other categories of wastewater operations needing permits but the focus here is community type systems with a direct discharge point to receiving waters of the state. Vermont DEC data indicates there are 103 community type wastewater facilities in this category.

More information on the federal and state guidance for these systems more can be found as follows, For public drinking water see the Federal Safe Drinking Water Act & Vermont Water Supply Rule <http://dec.vermont.gov/content/vermont-water-supply-rule>

For public wastewater treatment facilities - Federal Clean Water Act & VT Water Pollution Control Permit Regulations <http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/documents/dec-wpc-regs-1974-02-26.pdf> and an associated amendment to this rule <http://dec.vermont.gov/sites/dec/files/documents/dec-wpc-chap1312-1991-10-07.pdf>

The noted systems operate with some organizational structure and from the top down, a board (could be selectboard, commission, trustees, prudential committee), management and or director, and operations personnel. For many smaller systems there are instances where personnel are filling multiple roles. The complexity of the systems organizational structure including staffing numbers needed is varied from

system to system. This will be determined by the size and complexity of operations to include number and types of customers served, volume treated in terms of wastewater treatment and related items.

Public drinking water and wastewater systems have dedicated operating budgets to cover expenses. Expenses are varied and include everything needed to operate the system as if it were a business. Some expenses include, bond and or loan payments, personnel expenses, maintenance / upgrade funds, capital investment funds, permit fees, equipment fees, electrical fees, insurance coverage(s), communications, and testing fees as examples. Revenue to cover operating costs is generated from fees collected from customers in all classes (resident, commercial & industrial). Some systems have policies established to charge customers connection and services fees. Just like a business the objective with given budgets is to cover operating costs and insure a balanced budget year to year.

In regards to operations these are some of the common items completed regularly,

- Daily operations of treatment facilities.
- Testing of public drinking water product to insure it is meeting standards as defined by the Safe Drinking Water Act and Vermont Water Supply Rule.
- Testing of effluent from wastewater facility to insure compliance with permit discharge standards as defined by Clean Water Act and more specifically the NPDES permit as issued by VT DEC.
- Daily checks of treatment facilities and all other associated infrastructure including the distribution network and collection systems.
- Ongoing maintenance activities such as repairs, system flushing, collection system inspection / repairs and preventative maintenance activities.
- Reading of meters where pertinent.
- Completing required paperwork.
- Budgeting and asset management planning ongoing.
- Call-outs to address emergency situations.
- Conducting repairs in facilities and in the field on distribution lines, valves, collection systems, pump stations, etc.
- Regular interaction with customers in all areas from billing and service questions to questions on reliability of the product and services being provided.

Operation of a public water and wastewater system is no easy task. In Vermont the vast majority of the systems do an excellent job keeping operations going 365/24/7 and meeting or exceeding given regulatory standards. A key goal is also being met to keep the tap flowing and allowing wastewater to be sent to the line for treatment for all residential and commercial /industrial users. While the primary focus of these systems to provide water and wastewater service it also needs to be recognized this service is critical to the economy of a given area and the state overall.

The Village of Waterbury (water and wastewater departments) are and have been a member with VRWA for many years. Their personnel have attended a number of continuing education trainings offered by our association. In addition we have worked alongside their personnel for selected onsite work for both water and wastewater system operations. From our perspective the personnel act professionally and therefore the system(s) are run in a professional and sound business manner. It is VRWA's opinion the formation of the utility district as part of the charter change noted in H. 716 would be a reasonable change. Assuming the utility district is formed, VRWA is not aware of any negative impacts to water and wastewater operations and or negative impacts to the customers now and to be served into the future.