

Thursday, September 14, 2006

Letter to the Editor

As development progresses in Upper Bucks County, we need to be alert that the demands on our available drinking water do not surpass supply. In Nockamixon and neighboring townships, residents rely exclusively on private wells to supply their drinking water. If the present rate of development continues, our wells will start to go dry on a regular basis.

In Nockamixon Township the minimum lot size is two acres per home. The Bridgeton-Nockamixon-Tinicum Joint Groundwater Management Committee (BNT JGMC) has studied the rate at which water refills (recharges) the local underground water supply (aquifer). This rate depends on specific local geology. Due to the geological conditions in our township, a two acre lot in Nockamixon does not support the water needs of a typical home about 400 gallons per day. For the aquifer to collect that amount of water, it has to come from a much larger area of land than two acres.

The average well depth in Pennsylvania is 180 feet. The wells in Nockamixon average 300 feet. We have trouble finding water now. The problem will only get worse as the competition for remaining water increases, unless action is taken now for careful planning. Drilling your well deeper is only a temporary (and costly) solution to an inevitable problem. As more residents drill wells, there is less water to supply them, just as a bucket becomes empty if you pour water out faster than it refills; it does not matter how big your bucket is, it will still eventually become empty.

Houses can be located and designed to survive 100-year floods. Lot size can also be set so that your well will go dry only during a typical worst drought in 100 years, 50 years, or 10 years. This is not a technical question, but rather the level of risk that you want to take. We are therefore asking for your input in order to decide how often we want our wells to go dry. The minimum lot size will have to increase very sizably to meet this requirement and there are consequences to this decision. We need agreement from the community to set the level of risk they want to assume.

We are not trying to stop all development, but plan for development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Sustainable Development). Our goal is to maintain the rural character of Nockamixon. Instituting municipal water and sewer would completely destroy that rural character. Municipal water and sewer is neither necessary, nor is it the answer, but responsible planning today is required.

The BNT JGMC has written a draft ordinance that links future development to water supply. It will be presented to township officials and the general public at a special forum on Wednesday September 27 at 7:30 PM in the Palisades High School Auditorium. The problems and issues that development raises relating to our township's water supply will be explained, followed by a question and answer period.

If you are interested in finding out why you might run out of water, come to the forum, educate yourself on these issues and make your concerns known to your township officials.

Stephen Donovan,  
[Nockamixon resident and member of the BNT JGMC]