

# Springfield comes out in force to oppose sewage system

## Treatment plant proposed for 35-home development

*Heather Radick*

Residents filled the Springfield Fire Company hall May 22 to learn about Act 537 and the proposed changes to the township's sewage facilities plan.

The plan covers township wastewater disposal. HMH, the developer for the proposed Rolling Hills subdivision, has asked the township to revise the plan to allow for a community sewage treatment system in the proposed 35-lot cluster subdivision on Slifer Valley and Old Bethlehem roads.

The package treatment plant would distribute treated effluent into a drip irrigation system. The proposed subdivision is located on 78 acres in the Agricultural Security District. The township's current plan calls for individual on-lot sewage disposal for this area.

The audience members voiced their opposition to any revisions to Act 537, and came prepared with research and information to back up their reasoning.

Scott Douglas spoke on behalf of the Cook's Creek Watershed Association, which has asked the board to not change Act 537 to allow for a community sewer facility.

"Once one of these goes through, it clears the way for others to go through. And as you've seen down county, once these things start going up, they are like mushrooms, and they all want to get together. Then we have community sewage, which completely changes the character of the township," said Douglas.

Tom Cochrane from Pleasant Valley said that changing the plan will bring more developers and more houses.

Residents also voiced concern over the ultimate ownership and maintenance costs of the plant. Resident Joseph Raynock said that package systems tend to fail within 5 to 10 years. He said a drip irrigation system is doomed to fail on the property for many reasons including the high groundwater tables and impermeable clay soil.

Raynock said the state Department of Environmental Protection is almost forcing townships to take control of any package sewer plant. He referred to a failed system in the Timberly Farms develop-

ment in Plumstead Township. The development can't afford the repairs, and the residents and township now need to meet with the DEP.

"What do you tell all these people in this development? To move out, turn your water off? You can't use your bathrooms because you're in violation? Sooner or later, the residents of Springfield Township are going to be facing this, no ifs, ands or buts," said Raynock.

Dennis Steskal estimates that a more realistic cost for the township to control this type of sewer facility would be over \$100,000 a year, as opposed to the projected \$60,000.

Possible impact to Cook's Creek is another area of concern. It is an Exceptional Value Cold Water Stream. Dan Weaver spoke on behalf of Bucks County Trout Unlimited. He noted that his organization, along with the Cook's Creek Watershed Association and Durham and Lower Saucon townships, have put many years of effort into protecting Cook's Creek and its tributaries.

"We have an obligation to the watershed to do our homework on appropriate sewage treatment in this watershed. This is a water quality issue, and we all live downstream," stated Weaver.

Douglas also noted that nitrates are the main pollutant of concern in the Cook's Creek Watershed. He pointed out that nitrates come mostly from improperly installed, operated and maintained septic systems. Douglas asked the board to consider forming a steering committee made up of members of the public, in addition to the EAC and planning commission.

Springtown resident Ray Janus said that he is dead set against the plan, noting that several lots would be encroaching on wetlands areas.

Barton Fleishman's and Patrice Ryan's properties are adjacent to the proposed development. Fleishman said his farm fields already have flooding issues. Ryan offered the board photographs providing evidence of the flooding problems on her property, showing that the soil does not hold water.

Ken Simmons, a 26-year Springfield resident, commented that residents expect

that the township supervisors, and the plans they put in place, are there to help protect residents and their interests.

"We believe that we have put in place the necessary rules and regulations, and we see no reason to grant waiver after waiver to a developer who does not even live in the area, and who has no real interest in the area once his house is up and casts a shadow," Simmons said.

Hans Reiman, a 22-year resident, voiced his opposition: "I would like to see the community stand up behind our supervisors, and tell this developer to conform to our current plan. Increase the size of the lots, even if it means less houses, and have an onsite systems, which are much easier to manage for all of us."

Supervisor Karen Bedics read written comments from Stephen Donovan, who said that a 35-home development serving a package plant is too small to be economically viable, and it would simply be a matter of time before the township would own it. In his letter, Donovan referred to \$833,439 fine from the DEP to Great Wolf Lodge after citing it for three separate violations.

"Could a small homeowners association pay these kinds of fines, or have the deep pockets to maintain and upgrade the facilities? That is why the township will eventually end up with the joy of owning this facility," Donovan wrote.

Bedics voiced her own concerns about the ability of the soil to maintain the flow of the sewage and maintenance costs. An estimate received from the engineer lists the cost of maintaining a package treatment plant at \$143 per household per month.

After the public comment, township Solicitor Terry Clemons announced that in light of the comments made, and the consideration of evaluating the maintenance cost and other matters, he felt that the township was not in a position to make a decision on ownership of the proposed system.

After the Springfield Township Planning Commission's review next month, the public's feedback along with the supervisors' decision will be forwarded to DEP.