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Wellhead Protection Committee: In-depth look at water

By Wellhead Protection Committee

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WAYLAND — The development of Wayland's first Wellhead Protection Plan, presented at the Board of Public Works meeting last week, is the culmination of the work of the Wellhead Protection Committee.

The Wellhead Protection Committee was formed by the former Board of Water Commissioners in 2007 and has worked with the successor Board of Public Works since 2009. Although the committee has accomplished numerous tasks related to its mission, the majority of its almost 100 meetings were devoted to articulating water protection goals and risk management strategies for the town's drinking water.

In its efforts to find realistic and workable strategies, the committee consulted with our water superintendents and staff of town departments, as well as the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), and incorporated their recommendations for dealing with potential sources of contamination of the town wells.

The committee also met numerous times with its source water protection specialist, Bruce Young of the Mass. Rural Water Association, who was recommended by DEP and funded through the Environmental Protection Agency at no cost to the town. Unfortunately, Young's position has been eliminated effective August 2011 due to drastic cuts to federal funding of clean water initiatives. Fortunately for the town, the Wellhead Protection Committee was able to benefit from his knowledge and expertise before that happened.

Historically, Wayland has enjoyed very high water quality, which over time came to be taken for granted. This has not been a cost-effective approach. In recent years, threats to water quality and supply have led to the need for expensive treatment measures, including construction of the water treatment facility adjacent to Baldwin Pond. This is a clear case in which an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Common sources of groundwater contamination are leaking or malfunctioning septic systems, residential lawn care and gardening, household hazardous chemicals, pharmaceuticals and personal care products, stormwater runoff, deicing agents, leaking underground storage tanks (USTs), leaking fuel tanks and/or spills from fluid transfers, and hazardous waste spills during transport or disposal.

The Wellhead Protection Plan provides strategies to reduce immediate threats from these and other contaminants as well as proactive strategies for future protection to ensure long-term source water sustainability. It is a working document intended to be reviewed annually by the

Wellhead Protection Committee and updated every three years to remain current, active and viable.

While focusing on the protection of our drinking water, the strong connection between water usage levels and water quality must not be overlooked or underestimated. Our recommendations regarding conservation education and outreach to the residents and the schools are not presented as simply a good idea, but are necessary to maintain Wayland's right to withdraw water from the aquifer under the Water Management Act.

Water quality can be improved by conserving water, particularly water used for landscaping and irrigation. Lawn irrigation is by far the most important reason for the near doubling of Wayland's peak water use in the summer. Excessive lawn watering does not just waste treated water and contribute to potential contamination by naturally occurring compounds, it also alters the grass plant ecosystem, requiring more fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides. The water runoff from irrigation, which contains these and other contaminants, can then enter the water supply.

Because of Wayland's virtually complete reliance on individual septic systems, water conservation is also linked to prevention of well contamination by septage. Lower use of water allows waste to spend more time in the septic tank and decompose more fully before being discharged to the ground through the leaching field. This becomes even more important where septic systems are substandard, failing or poorly maintained.

The Wellhead Protection Plan is available on the Wellhead Protection Committee's website (www.wayland.ma.us/Pages/WaylandMA_BComm/WellheadProtection/Wellhead%20Protection%20Plan).

The document is organized around the five different wellhead areas (Happy Hollow, Baldwin Pond, Chamberlain, Campbell and Meadowview) and includes detailed maps, tables, appendices and resources, with links to additional documents. Each section ends with a chart showing specific action steps, identifying who would logically be responsible for carrying them out.

The process of writing the Wellhead Protection Plan made it clear the town needs a strong Wellhead Protection Committee to manage the implementation of recommendations in partnership with the Department of Public Works and other town entities. In addition to continuing education and outreach programs, the committee could also work on many tasks such as monitoring activities within the Aquifer Protection District, which comprises about 59 percent of the land in Wayland; developing other source protection plans and projects resulting from the management strategies; and pursuing water supply protection grants.

The plan is an in-depth comprehensive look at where the town is with respect to protection of the water supply and what can be done to ensure a sustainable water future for our community. We hope that residents will take the time to review it and become involved in protecting the town's natural aquatic resources, the sole source of Wayland's drinking water.

The members of the Wellhead Protection Committee are Sherre Greenbaum, Jennifer Riley, Linda Segal, Tom Sciacca and Kurt Tramosch.