

# TOWN OF JAMAICA

## Community Septic Feasibility Study

### Project Update

In August 2020, the Jamaica Planning Commission (JPC) prepared an application to receive a planning advance from the State of Vermont to complete a feasibility study to determine whether certain sites in the Town of Jamaica could serve as a community septic system. In the fall of 2020, the Selectboard signed and submitted the application, and received State approval for a planning advance to fund the study. The State's planning advance is set up where the Town can conduct the study using the funds, and payback is not required if the Town decides to not move forward with installation of a community septic system. This allows the Town to determine whether a community septic system is feasible without bearing the financial burden to do the work. If the Town decides to move forward with design and construction, the planning advance would require payback, likely in the form of a construction loan. Any available State or Federal funding options would also be utilized, where available, during construction.

An RFP was issued to hire an engineer, and in March of 2022 the town contracted with the Dufresne Group (DG) of Manchester, Vermont to prepare and carry out a scope of work for the feasibility study. The planning advance included an amount to fund the entire scope of work that was prepared by the engineer, including the cost of the engineer, and the details of which would be documented in a Preliminary Engineer Report (PER).

During the initial steps of completing the feasibility study, DG was able to obtain approval for additional funding from the State to perform additional tasks, including the inclusion of an alternatives analysis into the study. The additional approved funding is in the form of a loan from the State that is 100% forgivable and does not require payback, assuming appropriate use of the funds.

This project summary has been prepared to provide a background of why the feasibility study is being conducted, and where the project stands. For additional information, or to ask any questions, you can email the chairman of the JPC at [blzieroff@gmail.com](mailto:blzieroff@gmail.com), or attend any of the JPC meetings that are held at the Town offices at 7 pm on the third Monday of every month.

### Feasibility Study Background

**Project History:** The Town of Jamaica is one of several towns in Windham County contemplating the need for a community water and/or wastewater system. Many of these towns are realizing that the existing water and wastewater situations in their villages is one of the limiting factors for economic and community development, as well as being a factor for public health. The JPC has been discussing this limitation for over 20 years and has posed the question of whether water and/or wastewater is a problem in the village, which has historically been served by private wells

and on-site wastewater systems. By answering this question, through the PER report, the JPC will be able to properly plan for and promote revitalization in Jamaica.

The Town previously contracted with the Windham Regional Commission to conduct a “Water Quality and Septic Study” in 2000. The purpose of this study was to evaluate existing conditions in Jamaica Village in regard to water quality, capacity and future growth potential, and make recommendations to address identified deficiencies or issues. The study concluded that there were existing capacity issues for both water and wastewater. The study also indicated that existing septic systems were potentially a cause of e.coli contamination in the adjacent stream and were a risk to potable wells due to lack of adequate isolation distance, or “setback”. The study identified potential solutions including centralized and decentralized wastewater treatment, a wastewater ordinance, and community education.

Through additional studies and the ever-evolving State regulatory environment concerning drinking water and wastewater management, the JPC was able to identify a growing set of use limitations for properties in the village. These use limitations, due to the close proximity of drinking water wells and septic systems in the Village not meeting setback requirements, were prevalent for any property with a potential for multiple uses outside of residential, like a restaurant or coffee shop. These setback requirements not only limited potential uses, it prevented certain options for septic system upgrades or replacement. For example, the building containing Change Yoga had a development plan to add a bar and restaurant to the remaining ground floor space, and rental rooms on the second floor. After completing the State reviews, the owner was told that the building had a commercial use limitation of 8 seats, upgrading the current septic system for the planned use was not permissible, there were no permissible locations on the property for a new septic system, and the drinking water well could not be permitted for public use. The project was dead in the water. Another example is that the old Jamaica coffee shop can no longer be a coffee shop.

It became clear to the JPC that if property owners in the village want options for how they use their properties, actions would be needed to resolve the use limitations driven by State regulations and the current septic and water supply systems. Since the limitations were driven by setback requirements, the available solutions included elimination of the enforceable setback by removing the drinking water well or septic system. Action options to remove a private drinking water well or septic system from service included connection to a public water supply system or a community septic system.

The Town of Jamaica previously considered a community water system through a study performed by DG in November 2018. The study reconfirmed and documented specific regulatory limitations in the village related to private drinking water wells and septic systems, and that a public water system would provide relief for certain restrictions on use and redevelopment options. The Town pursued proposals for finding a source for a community water system with the intention of having a public vote to decide whether to proceed with finding a source through a groundwater feasibility study, well installation, and a pumping test. The concept was to pursue

a public water system to allow for abandonment of existing wells, which in turn would result in more space for private septic system expansion and/or replacement. In October 2019, following a public presentation from the selected hydrogeologist, the community voted against pursuing source exploration for a public water system. One of the recurring points made by members of the community during the water study was that it would cost a lot of money just to know what the community water supply options were, and what the potential build-out costs would be. Wastewater was also mentioned by some as a more significant concern than potable water.

In 2020, a property owner on the edge of the village contacted the Town with an offer to collaborate on a wastewater system. This restarted the discussions with the JPC to pursue a wastewater study, considering that the community seemed to have more support for this type of solution. At that time, State funding also became available (our planning advance) for Towns to complete a feasibility study and understand the details associated with cost and buildout for a project, without carrying the financial burden to do so. Since the start of the study, an additional offer to collaborate on a water or wastewater system on private property has been made.

**Current Project Study Area:** The project planning area for the current study includes the Village of Jamaica. The village is currently served by individual soil-based wastewater disposal systems and is located within the West River watershed. The extent of the project planning (study) area, the Designated Village Center, and the preferred location for a community septic system will be clearly documented on Figures included in the PER. The entire study area falls within ¼-mile of the Designated Village Center. The study area was developed to focus on the more densely developed area in and around the designated village. The study area is solely for the purposes of defining the extent of the feasibility study and does not represent the extent of any potential future wastewater system.

## **Scope of Work Status**

**Administrative Work Completed:** Since this is a study being completed with State funding, the funding requirements included the designation of a group of Town representatives that would work with the selected engineer (DG) to provide updates, attend milestone meetings, and allow for the State to ensure that their provided funds are being appropriately used and the project goals are being achieved. The group of Town representatives that make up the “Septic Committee” include Bryan Zieroff (Chairman of the JPC), Greg Muelmans (member of the Selectboard), Patrick McQuillen (member of the JPC and Village property owner), and Jason Kass (civil engineer and expert in septic systems). This group was selected based on interest in the project, representation of both the JPC and Selectboard, project specific expertise, construction expertise, and a mix of property owners from both the Village and outskirts of Jamaica. As previously mentioned, DG was the selected engineer, and Chrissy Haskins (also a citizen of Jamaica) is the DG project manager overseeing the study.

**Site/Study Area Work Completed:** DG has completed the initial project scope through the State indicated 60% completion level, which included the following:

- An identification of the project study area,
- An analysis of growth and population trends,
- A review of area resources and potential impacts to sensitive receptors such as river corridors, flood plains, farmland, etc.
- Compilation of background data from maps, databases, and previous reports, and
- An analysis of alternative community septic system sites.

This information was used to start a draft copy of the PER. The State, since it is funding the project, requires that the project is reviewed at certain milestones, which are identified as 30%, 60%, and 90% levels of completion. Our DG project manager, along with the Septic Committee (hereon referred to as the Town Septic Group), have fulfilled the requirement of presenting the necessary data to the State at the 30% and 60% levels of completion. Although not required by the State, the Town Septic Group ran the 30% and 60% presentations at the Town offices so members of the public could attend and ask questions. These milestone meetings allow for the State to determine whether their funding is being spent by the receiving town in a responsible and timely fashion, and that the Town will remain on schedule and fulfill the State requirements for funding the project.

**Work To Be Completed:** Over the next few months, the remaining scope requirements, which include the site-specific investigations, will be completed. These steps include the collection and analysis of site-specific data, preparation of a 90% draft PER, and a Town Meeting presentation of all compiled data. The fieldwork will include excavation of test pits, soil sampling, and the completion of percolation tests to determine the suitability of the selected community septic system site, and the size, type, and anticipated cost of any proposed septic system.

It is important to note that since this project is being funded by the State, specific requirements (i.e., archeological review and investigation) are required to be completed, reviewed, and approved of by the State in order to continue with the project. This process, at times, can influence the project schedule in ways that are out of Town control. The JPC and Selectboard will provide monthly updates to keep the Town abreast of the project status.