

Crown Point to enlist the public as water main hisses to extinction



Crown Point's 1890 Water Main is deteriorating at a rapid clip. "The water is physically wearing out the copper to where it's paper-thin," said Water Superintendent Gary Allen. AES Principal Engineer Todd Hodgson said he's never seen anything like it. A public hearing will be held on Wednesday, Oct. 15 to discuss solutions.

By [Pete DeMola](#)

CROWN POINT — The water main running through town is 125 years old. It's leaky and broken in 30 different places. Unpredictable pressure spikes have led to overworked valves, resulting in destructive torrents of water blasting through a pipe that is paper-thin in some places and wrapped in asbestos.

This system is going to blow. When it does, it's going to leave a lot of locals out in the cold.

Literally.

But catastrophe from this simmering aquatic countdown to extinction can be averted.

This wheezing line serves 429 households in two water districts, roughly 25 percent of the town.

As authorities come closer to making a decision for moving forward with funding applications to remedy the problem, an income survey is key.

If each of the 429 households within the district accurately fills out a household income survey, then municipal authorities can meet the requirements to attract the proper grant package to fund the project.

HOW IT WORKS

To unlock funding, state and federal agencies require a demonstration that residents of the water district are within a certain bracket of water service charges.

Those charges are determined by income levels as reported to the US Census.

Crown Point and Essex County officials say the numbers in Crown Point are too low as a result of a skewed census surveys, a distortion that has freezed them out of the grant application process.

The town has some of the lowest water rates in the region.

If the formula is adjusted, residents will pay more per year in water changes, but the town has a chance to land the grants that will prevent a system meltdown.

The worst case scenario for doing nothing would be a permanent boil order and an inability to fight fires due to insufficient water pressure.

People will get sick and houses will burn down.

‘EVERY SOURCE OF COMMUNICATION’

Crown Point has three options for moving forward:

The most basic option is replacement of the 1890 Water Main. The second is a replacement with source improvements, while the gold-plated deluxe option would also add improvements to the Pearl Street well.

Supervisor Charles Harrington said the income survey process will be confidential.

“No one from the town offices, no employee or elected official, will be seeing the results of individual survey,” he said at a troubleshooting meeting last week. “We will see the combined analysis, which I’m sure will disprove the census figures.”

Essex County’s Industrial Development Agency will facilitate the process.

Co-Executive Director Jodi Olcott said it’s crucial for the users in both districts to return the forms.

Each funding source requires their own identical survey.

Apartment renters must complete their surveys, not the landlords. Employees of local businesses also need to participate even if they don't live in the water district to help officials zero in on employment numbers.

Olcott said if it is determined that the project will have a significant economic impact on Main Street, additional funding may be secured.

"It not difficult to send out, it's difficult to get back," she said.

Surveys will be sent out this week. After that, it's a matter of knocking on doors for follow-ups.

"They have to understand that significance and believe in the importance of it," said Olcott.

A similar undertaking Ticonderoga took almost a year.

"It was cumbersome, to say the least."

Harrington stressed fine-tuned synchronicity between town, county and state officials and the news media.

Town employees may also be utilized if survey results are not forthcoming.

"We need to utilize every source of communication to assure the general public that this is in their best interest," he said.

TICK TOCK

Essex County Director of Community Resources Mike Mascarenas said it was critical that the process be started soon.

"These things do take a long time. We're going to work, do the very best we can," he said. "It takes buying in from the citizens to do that."

#February is D-Day. If the survey results aren't in by then, officials will have to tiptoe around catastrophe for another year.

"The potential impact of someone not completing the survey will be tremendous," said Mascarenas. "This affects your pocketbook daily for 30 years."

If funding is approved, construction will likely start in 2016. Additional components will include permanently capping the defunct Pearl Street well and upgrading control systems and meters.

A public hearing will be held on Wednesday, Oct. 15 at the school auditorium to discuss the project.

