

Pinelands no closer to sewers

By Frank Caligiuri, *Monroe Township councilman*

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This is in response to the July 19 article, "Group criticizes Pinelands Commission," about the Pinelands Preservation Alliance's concerns about the potential for public water and sewer service in the Diamond Lakes section of Monroe Township:

A former vacation retreat turned permanent settlement, most Diamond Lakes homes remain equipped with 60-year-old private wells and septic systems on lots with a high water table, surrounding a lake. The state Pinelands Commission (which limits development in designated areas for environmental protection) would not allow homes with private wells and septic systems to be built on this size lot today for fear that septic waste would infiltrate into well water.

In May, Theresa Lettman, identified in the article as a PPA member, attended public meetings that I scheduled with Diamond Lake residents. The meetings were intended to inform local residents about the possibility of running public sewers to the area. At first meeting, Lettman distributed literature advising residents how to evaluate and maintain their own septic systems. Residents subsequently advised me through a straw pole that I should discontinue efforts to bring public sewers to their area since their sewage disposal all conformed with all legal standards, based on advice residents received from Lettman and one resident.

In an Oct. 6, 2008, letter I advised residents that Diamond Lakes would remain listed on the "208 (wastewater) plan" as a community "eligible for sewer should the need arise later." Since then, Lettman, along with one local resident, has been waging a war to remove Diamond Lakes from the 208 plan.

Anonymous and absolutely ridiculous literature has been circulated throughout the community, accusing the mayor and council of everything from wanting to build high-rise, low-income projects and shopping centers throughout this densely wooded and tightly constructed community of approximately 35 homes. To my knowledge, there exists only one remaining residential lot of suitable size for construction within the entire community.

It is interesting to note that this remaining lot offers a wilderness view for the one resident who has been most vocal in this matter. Hopefully one resident's wilderness view won't be the cause of a community-wide health hazard and the pollution of an entire waterway. The PPA opposed an engineering study that could have determined whether this would happen, and the group offered blind assurance that everything is fine. Nothing has changed since my letter of Oct. 6, 2008. Diamond Lakes is still listed on the 208 plan as a community that might eventually require public sewer, just as I said a year ago.

My only "mistake" in this process was actually trying to do what the people of Diamond Lakes asked me to do during my campaign tour of 2004. Neither the state nor the township are looking for places to spend \$5 million, or to make 35 property owners unhappy in the process. It's more economical to evacuate the area if necessary.

Since the residents have certified that their wells have been tested and their septic systems are in compliance with standards, we have no choice but to believe them. If that's not true, they will be held accountable.

The Pinelands Preservation Alliance has certainly fueled suspicion through its actions. Why wouldn't an organization like the PPA want to conduct tests to learn whether 60-year-old septic systems are overflowing into private drinking water wells and the lake itself?

Who is convincing the residents of Diamond Lakes that it's a terrible thing to simply be identified on a plan for future sewer expansion if it later becomes necessary? What, besides secrecy, false political accusations and possible septic contamination, is the PPA trying to preserve?