

Community gets look at Pearce Creek solutions

By Jacob Owens jowens@cecilwhig.com | Posted: Sunday, June 1, 2014 9:30 pm

EARLEVILLE — Dozens of residents living in communities affected by contaminated groundwater near the Pearce Creek Dredge Material Containment Area took time Saturday to talk with officials and learn more about the solutions underway.

The open house, held at the Bay View Estates boat ramp, shed new light on the progress to build a municipal water line from Cecilton to the Bay View Estates, Westview Shores and Sunset Pointe communities, as well as the sealing of the dredge site.

Dave Blazer, Maryland Port Authority deputy director of harbor development, said the two projects are directly linked.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineer officials are seeking to reopen the dredge disposal site so approach channels between the C&D Canal and Port of Baltimore can be cleared. Before the site can be reopened, however, the Corps must obtain a Water Quality Certificate from the Maryland Department of the Environment, which won't sign off until the site has been sealed and residents are given a safe source of drinking water. Hence the development of a 7-mile water pipeline from Cecilton west to the Earleville communities.

Tim Kelly, Corps project manager for the C&D Canal, said his office plans to submit the certificate application by the end of June. The plan to be submitted includes the clearing and grubbing of the top layer of the disposal site followed by the installation of a high-density polyethylene panel liner welded together to be impervious. The liner has a lifespan of 50 years when exposed in the sun, but no one is sure how long a buried liner would last, officials told residents. The installation process would take about eight months, and Corps officials are still hopeful that dredging could resume in fall 2015.

As part of the water quality certificate process, a public hearing will be held in the summer to listen to resident's concerns, Blazer said. "If everything goes as planned, we hope to have a decision from MDE by September," he added.

Meanwhile, officials with URS Corp. were also answering residents concerns about the municipal water system to be brought in from Cecilton. Maryland Department of Transportation, the umbrella department for MPA, funded a \$197,000, 30-percent design and engineering study to get a better idea of the scope and cost of work for the pipeline. Ed Strauss, a professional engineer with URS, said the plan includes 241 homes and 160 empty lots. The pipeline would run 7 miles from Cecilton along Crystal Beach Road to Grove Neck Road to Pond Neck Road. Once at the communities, another 7 miles of pipes would be laid in the neighborhoods, Strauss estimated.

Currently, the estimated \$10-12 million project doesn't not include plans for elevated water storage or fire protections, including hydrants. It would, however, include all costs to hook up participating homes to the municipal system.

Some residents questioned whether they could keep their well system connected to the house in case of emergencies, but were told no due to concerns of cross contamination. The plan would include the abandoning of residential wells, which every home in the communities have. That process would include the removal of pumps, and grouting and capping of the well.

Residents, who range from year rounders to seasonal to weekenders, came out for a variety of different reasons on Saturday.

George Brown, who has been coming to Westview Shores for 25 years and began residing there permanently 10 years ago, wanted to find out more about the water system.

"I've had my water tested and it had 1,900 parts for dissolved solids; if you leave a glass of water in the sun for half an hour it will look like tea," he said. "The water system needs to be done, but we're worried about the price of it."

Veronica Wilson started coming to Westview Shores on the weekends from her home in Pennsylvania 16 years ago. She and her husband originally owned a lot in Indian Acres, but came across the Pearce Creek community by accident on a motorcycle ride.

"We love it here," she said. "We had our water tested and it wasn't bad, so I wanted to know if we could keep our wells in order to irrigate our gardens. I also wanted to find out how much the water system would cost."

State Sen. Stephen Hershey, Jr., said he was encouraged to see the progress toward solutions at Pearce Creek, but wanted to make sure that progress continued forward.

"I continue to feel that as the Corps and Port work toward reopening the site then so, too, should the water supply issue move forward," he said.

Blazer said the open house would go a long way toward smoothly out the progress into the future.

"We like these open houses because it allows us to not only present our plans to the public, but to also receive the community's



Pearce Creek open house

Chris Rogers (right), of URS Corp., answers questions from residents about the Cecilton water pipeline at the Pearce Creek community open house on Saturday.

12/23/2014

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feedback so that we can work on concerns in a timely manner,” he said.

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