

Scatter Creek Aquifer – Septic System Management Project

Purpose: To make sure water in the Scatter Creek Aquifer is safe to drink now and in the future.

Citizen's Committee approved notes: August 7, 2013, 6:15-8:15 pm. *Approved 9/18/13.*

Rochester School District Board Room (*old primary school, enter from front*)
10140 Highway 12 SW, Rochester, WA 98579

Attending: Gene Weaver, Tom Budsberg, Roger Max, Maureen Pretell, Sandra Adix, Lowell Deguise. **Facilitator:** Jane Mountjoy-Venning (staff). **Note taker:** Jane Mountjoy-Venning (staff). **Excused:** Karen Deal, Art Starry (staff). **Guests:** Jeff Pretell. **Absent:** Marlene Hampton, Chanele Shaw, Bruce Morgan, Scott Schimelfenig, Dave Dafoe.

Introductions

Agenda review and approval: approved

Approve June notes: approved

Other housekeeping: Jane asked if there was flexibility in people's schedules in September. Nadine is working hard on the model, but results may not be ready by our regularly scheduled meeting time. The committee said they were willing, if necessary, to change the meeting date to wait for the modeling results. If the results were not ready until the last week of September, they would prefer to wait until the regular meeting time in October.

Report on any community input, questions, etc. Debrief from Community Workshop.:

Committee comments about the community workshop:

- Happy with the number of people who attended (*about 60*).
- Thought the displays, information, and staff availability to answer questions was a good resource.
- Concerned that several questions during the Q&A session were answered incorrectly or incompletely, particularly the statement that Rochester was not part of the aquifer. From the perspective of many, Rochester includes the area from Gate to Grand Mound, and the water serving downtown Rochester comes from wells within the aquifer study area.
- Clarification was requested about ground rules for committee members at future community workshops. Members were unsure if they should have spoken up during the Q&A session to correct or clarify information. A suggestion was made that committee members and staff should sit up front in the future, to be better able to answer, correct, or clarify responses during Q&A times.
- The newspaper article in the Centralia Chronicle had a couple of inaccuracies including the location of the aquifer. Overall, the committee felt that the article did a good job of presenting the situation.
- Staff plans to send written and corrected responses to all questions to those who signed in at the workshop, to the update list, and post them on the website. The committee suggested that the corrections and complete answers also be sent to both the Chronicle and Rochester Sun newspapers along with the website links to more resources.
- A committee members shared some of the comments and interactions they had at the

workshop:

- Spoke with several long-term residents who were there “to see what the government was trying to shove down their throats.” The committee member had a conversation sharing her reasons for being involved in the project and encouraged them to check out the information available.
- Another person with large acreage was concerned about costs of any recommendations.
- Others said they appreciate what the project is doing, and wanted to let us know that not everyone is suspicious of government.
- Thanks to Gene for arranging the reader board announcements of the community workshop.
- The sound system was not good – hard to understand. If we use the school next time, we should try using their sound system, which we think is better.
- Committee members felt that we did a good job laying out the goal of the project and the process. The purpose is to protect the quality of the water.
- A discussion developed about reactions to zoning/regulation changes.
 - A member shared some history he felt contributes to sensitivity of people in the area to zoning/regulation changes. In the 1970’s he felt area residents were misled, even lied to about the intent and ramifications of early planning efforts. The planning activities were said to be informational only, but led to changes in regulations that curtailed use of many formerly buildable lots.
 - Another member stated that another problem is that people do not always take responsibility to read land use notices posted on roadsides, or in newspapers, and don’t make the effort to find out what is going on and participate.
 - Some felt that even when people did make an effort to be involved, they were not listened to. An example of the latest critical areas ordinance when busloads of people testified against the changes at the county and it was passed anyway.
 - Other examples of how stricter regulations have affected people were given. Increased buffer zones led to not being able to use much of a person’s property. Someone with 3 taxable lots learned that they are all unbuildable.
 - It was pointed out that the gopher question at the workshop might not have been about gophers, more about “smokescreen” – hiding intentions behind another issue.
 - A member stated that they appreciate that people want economic security, but are bothered by the tendency to misconstrue reasons for regulations and actions. They do not feel that this project is a smokescreen. We have to think into the future.
 - There is some inherent tension. Government has a responsibility to act on a mega scale. Individual property owners see on a smaller scale.
 - We can’t take land care for granted.

Initial Survey Results: Initial survey results were shared with the committee. As expected, there is a wide range of opinion about the issue of responsibility for clean, safe drinking water. Thus far, we have 60 responses. A complete summary will be done after the survey has been open for a month. Results and comments from the survey, the workshop, and the fairs will be compiled and posted on the website.

If we do another survey, it was suggested that we add the following question: “Do you believe the water you are drinking is the same your neighbor is drinking?” Longtime experience has shown a committee member that many people do not understand that water connects. Another member stated there was a need for education about groundwater basics.

Results from a survey done when the Grand Mound treatment facility was being planned found that the order people paid their bills was 1) cable, 2) electric, 3) water

Update: Free Water Sampling: Thus far 35 households have requested free water samples. The committee is interested in seeing the water sample results. Staff said that the names and exact addresses would not be shared, but the general locations and results likely could be. The information will be used to supplement the regular monitoring staff is doing.

Confirmed that work is being done to fill the data gap in the model. Lowell has been in touch with Heather with information about wells and several willing property owners in the area. There is still a data hole off Old 99.

Discussion: Next steps for public involvement: Discussed ideas for encouraging folks to participate in the next community workshop as well as other ideas for getting public input.

- Road signs
- Informational interviews with press and radio
- Utility bill inserts in Rochester Water Association bills (700 mailed)
- Direct mailing – 2 more planned, one before each community workshop. We should recheck the mailing list and boundary. The next mailing should clarify the boundary, since there is some confusion about whether or not Rochester is included due to the incorrect answer at the workshop.
- Speedway billboard
- Public Service Announcements on radio stations
- In mailings and interviews, get people involved thinking about water and the future.
- Need to do outreach to people “younger than Maureen” who were under-represented at the community workshop.
- Need simplified explanations about the reasons for the project and the groundwater modeling.
- Use the first 10 or so minutes at the next workshop giving an overview of geology and reasons behind the project. Roger is willing to help with developing simplified language and drawings.
- An overall impression, taking into account people’s concerns and mistrust – keep coming back to the need for education about the aquifer.
- Important to highlight that this is not a unilateral process by the county. We are seeking public input.
- One committee member stated that they are involved because they live here and don’t want the water to “go to hell” now or later. If the recommendations are ignored by decision-makers, they will speak up.
- Several committee members agreed with the statement that the committee has a good mix of people – it is honestly not stacked one way or another. There are different ends of the spectrum here.
- A member stated that they respect the input from people who have lived here all their life. That speaks volumes about their commitment. They have seen changes to the area, good and bad. Helpful to learn of distrust and how to build trust.
- At the end of the day, a member anticipates that they will find lots of things to recommend. Some areas should not have had wells installed in the first place. Think there will be many

positive things to come out of the process.

- We should seek input from “burned” homeowners who bore the brunt of poor regulation decisions.
- Look for ways for the county to support some necessary changes, if needed, for septic system changes such as financial assistance, local fees, state/federal grant assistance, tax increase...
- We should consider additional technologies to septic for handling sewage such as burning, recycling, and more. There are other technologies currently in use in other places. We should think outside the box or outside the drainfield.
- Costs of septic drainfield design and installation seem too high for what the technology is. Seems like overcharge, over engineered.

Public Comment: Jeff Pretell said he came to see and hear more details about this project his wife is involved in. Thought it was interesting and glad we are seeking public input about the project.

Wrap up

- Assume the next meeting is as scheduled on September 4, unless you hear differently. Jane will keep in touch about the status of the groundwater modeling results.