MEETING MINUTES: CCCoLA SEPTEMBER 08, 2023 COOK COUNTY COMMUNITY CENTER

PRESENT: KATHY BOGEN, BARB AND JOHN BOTTGER, GERRY CAPLE, BIZ CLARK, PATTY CRADDOCK, AL FLIEDER, KATE KELNBERGER, RORY AND PETE LAIHO, GARY MACIEJEWSKI, IRENE AND LARRY MULLEN, PETE RAUEN, JERRY WILKES, NEVA MAXWELL, MITCH EVERSON

Item	Discussion	Action
Welcome and Introductions (10-10:05)	Today, we were fortunate to be joined by Neva Maxwell, Cook County Land Services Planning & Zoning Administrator and Mitch Everson, Cook County Environmental Health Officer for our discussion of Septic System design, maintenance, inspection, and enforcement.	
Septic systems design, management, inspections, and enforcement in Cook County, Neva Maxwell and Mitch Everson (10:10- 10:45)	**Which Lakes have had all septic systems inspected?** Greenwood, McFarland, Tom, and a stretch of Lake Superior shoreline were inspected before 2015 when funding to inspect more lakes was inadequate to support. There were quite a few septic failures found during this period of inspections. The program of Lake inspections was reinstated this year, and another stretch of properties along Lake Superior will have septic inspections. There was quite a backlog of septic inspections and non-compliance with recommendations. The non-compliance issues were reduced significantly once attorneys were hired (through a grant). Prior to involvement of attorneys, there were 116 non-compliant septic systems of those inspected and given direction to rectify problems. There are now 12 that have failed to comply.	It would be helpful to do more publicity on the fact that there are legal ramifications for property owners who fail to bring their septic systems into compliance. Here is the University of Minnesota's Homeowner education website about septic systems: https://septic.umn.edu/all-about-septics AND https://septic.umn.edu/resources/septic-system-owners
	How are lake properties chosen for septic system inspections? Inland lakes chosen for inspections will be decided based on several factors including density and internal conversations with SWCD regarding water quality indicators.	
	What, if any, assistance is offered to property owners to bring their septic system up to code? There is a loan payback program available in Cook County to assist	More information on the Septic loan program here:

	property owners with paying for septic system repairs. The loan has a 10-year payback period with a 3% interest rate.	https://www.co.cook.mn.us/government/departments/auditor_treasurer/septic_loan.php -:~:text=The Cook County SSTS Loan,water quality and pollution problems
	Is a point-of-sale septic inspection required when property changes hands and is there a requirement for the property owner to remediate any problems identified prior to the sale? Cook County doesn't require a point-of sale septic inspection, but the condition of the septic system must be listed in the disclosure for the purchase agreement.	
	Does the County have a plan for addressing any potential shortage of septic services for installation, repair, maintenance, and pumping? There is currently an issue with having adequate capacity at the municipal waste disposal site in Cook County. When the site cannot accept any more waste, the pumper must bring it to Duluth or Superior for disposal.	
	Are the every 3-year septic inspections a suggestion or a requirement? If they are a suggestion now, does the County plan to make them a requirement? Currently, not a requirement.	
	What systems are in place to ensure septic systems are in compliance and how is this enforced? • When the pumper (such as G&G pumps out a septic tank or vault, they are required to send a report to Land Services. This is also a tie when the pumper will let the homeowner know if problems with the septic are noticed. • When a homeowner applies for a building in shoreland areas, this triggers a check to ensure there is a valid certificate of compliance (COC). If the COC is outdated, then a new septic inspection will be required. This is true of all properties including tiny homes and out buildings which require a set-back.	A new provision in the Cook County Vacation Rental Ordinance requires "All vacation rental operations shall maintain a current "Certificate of Compliance" for the septic treatment system serving that operation."

If neighbors or others have a concern about a septic system that shows signs of failing (smell, effluent, blooms, etc.) who should they contact? Land Services Department does follow up on complaints if they are brought to their attention. It is important to have some evidence (e.g. seepage, blooms, smell)	
What are the most common non-compliance issues? About 30% of septic systems statewide are non-compliant (of those inspected). Pit privies and trench systems are frequently non-compliant. Also, mound system failure and overuse.	See Addendum I "Why do Septic Systems Fail"
Care and maintenance of septic systems • It is important for property owners to understand that septic systems are designed to treat waste that has already been digested, therefore waste from in-sink food disposals, chemicals, paper products (other than toilet paper) will interfere with the proper function of the septic. • Septic systems often fail when there is a high flow of wastewater, so it is best to take short showers and avoid using a dishwasher, laundry machine, sinks, and toilets simultaneously. • VRBO hosts and property owners who host guests should have a noticeable placard out for guests to learn proper septic use.	More publicity needed to inform property owners and guests on the proper use of septic systems. Important for property owners to understand the difference between pumping and maintenance. Addendum II: Septic System Operation and Maintenance Tips

	Some additional notes on septic systems: • The State of Minnesota has rigorous septic system requirements and compliance standards which are informed by research done at the U of M. • The process for becoming a licensed septic installer, likewise, is rigorous and guided by this research. • The cost for a new septic system is around $40,000. A holding tank, which is made of concrete or polyethylene may be less expensive and must be pumped out regularly. • Gerry Caple noted that a holding tank system has the advantage of containing nutrients and medications that are present in human waste. These components of waste eventually seep into lakes, streams, and groundwater.	See Addendum III: *Protecting our water takes good drinking water and septic systems* for keeping chemicals out of drinking water More study needed on what is required to keep nutrients and medications out of the water supply. The CCCoLA members expressed enthusiastic thanks to Neva and Mitch for meeting with us and providing a wealth of valuable information. We agreed to make this a high priority topic to continue studying and being involved in.
Lake Superior North One and Rainy River Watershed Plans	Neva noted that the Lake Superior North and Rainy River Watershed plans have replaced the Cook County Water plan for providing guidance on water use and waste disposal (among many other topics) as they are based on more sophisticated scientific research such as measuring phosphorus levels in lakes.	Learn more here: https://www.co.cook.mn.us/government/departments/soil_and_water/watershed_planning.php Here is the Lake Superior North One Watershed, One Plan document created in 2017: https://www.co.lake.mn.us/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Lake-Superior-North-One-Watershed-One-Plan-

		20170523.pdf
Caribou Lake Surface Water Ordinance Update, Irene Mullen (10:45-10:55)	Cook County passed an ordinance 3 months ago to ban wake boats on Caribou Lake. 120 days was set for the DNR to study the ordinance and respond. On day 119, the DNR responded with a request for additional information. Some of this requested information was in the ordinance already and some was available from the DNR. 1. DNR requested to know about boat activity on the weekends. Amanda Weberg then provided and hourly report on the number and types of boats on Caribou Lake over a weekend. 2. DNR asked who would enforce the ban. Cook County Sheriff is responsible for this. 3. DNR noted that the ban on transition speeds would pose a problem for boaters. The ordinance specifies that the transition speed ban pertains to wake boats using transition speeds purposefully to create a wake. 4. DNR had concerns about speed limits. No speed limits are included in the ordinance. 5. DNR had questions about lake depth. In the exhibit section, is information about the areas of Caribou which are 20' or less in depth (this is a high percentage of the lake). Note: $500,00 was allocated by the legislature in 2023 for studying the effects of wake boats on lakes, shorelands, and wildlife.	Caribou Lake Association is working with the County Administrator on responding to the DNR. Caribou Lake is within the 1854 Treaty Boundary and there have been conversations with the Grand Portage Environmental Coordinator about whether GP would like to comment. The EC will present this to the Grand Portage Council. Bois Forte Council may also wish to comment. Biz Clark suggested that Caribou Lake Assn. ask the DNR who reviewed the request and what their experience is with wake boats.
MNCOLA Report, Biz Clark (10:55-11:05)	Biz was involved in establishing MNCoLA about 15 years ago. MNCoLA provides support for a lobbyist who works with lawmakers on issues of importance to lakeshore property owners and others who support shoreland and waterway quality. Last 2 year's MNCOLA focus was on resiliency of waterways. MNCOLA will be holding a meeting on September 19 in Little Falls MN. Guest speaker will be Dr. Mark Seeley who will be speaking on the climate change impact to Minnesota lakes. There is a need to increase membership in MNCOLA so that the organization can maintain robust advocacy. Individuals as well as Lake Associations can join.	CCCoLA members are encouraged to register for and attend the MNCOLA meeting either in person or virtually. To learn more about MNCOLA, register for the September 19 meeting, and to join go to https://mncola.org/
Get the Lead Out update, Biz Clark (11:05-11:15)	Numerous excellent ideas were shared at the August CCCoLA meeting for expanding GLO awareness and action. Ilena and Biz will be working on	As we will be meeting in action groups and as a whole

	outreach to schools. Another good outreach is Cook County Visitor Center.	October-April via Zoom, GLO will be one of the groups.
Approval August 11, 2023 CCCoLA Minutes (10:05-10:10)	Location is incorrect in the August minutes.	Gary moved to approve with location edit. Gerry 2nd. Approved unanimously.
Treasurers Report, Gary Maciejewski (11:15-11:20)	Income: $760 Balance $1,143.41 Available funds $$1,153.32	
Proposal to meet virtually October-April (December exception) in action groups, and as the full CCCoLA Board, every other month 11:20-11:25	The Steering Committee has recommended that CCCoLA meet October-April (with the exception of December) via Zoom so that we don't lose momentum on the work we are doing once the busy summer season ends. We may find also that our summer meetings are a little less packed with topics if we are able to spread our work out more throughout the year. This would also ensure we are engaged during the legislative session when our input may be valuable. Every other month could be dedicated to action committee meetings with the full membership meeting on the other months.	The members agreed unanimously to meet virtually meet October-April (with the exception of December) via Zoom as described.
Proposal to meet on the 2nd Thursday of the month instead of the 1st Friday to reduce scheduling conflicts.	As the Watershed meetings occur on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of the month and childcare is an issue on Fridays in general, we could move our meetings to a Thursday and better include Ilena Hensel, Ann Sullivan, and Amanda Weberg.	CCCoLA members agreed unanimously to move our meetings to the 2nd Thursday of the month 10-11:30 a.m..
South Greenwood Lake Road Owners join CCCoLA	Rory Laiho reported that the South Greenwood Road Owners have decided to join CCCoLA.	Welcome to SGLRO. Thanks to Rory and Doug Laiho!
Closing reflection (11:25-11:30)	Good to hear from Mitch Everson. Great that Mitch and Neva came to share the information on waste and septics. Septic topic was interesting. Thinking about what works. Informative. Satisfied. Content and results.	
Next Meeting	**Next meeting will be via Zoom on Thursday, October 12, 10-11:30 a.m.**	

Addendum I: Why do septic systems fail?

Excerpt from U of M Landowner Septic Information (https://septic.umn.edu/all-about-septics)

Failure of your or a neighbor's septic system means that wastewater may come in contact with people or enter the natural environment without complete treatment of all harmful contents. Indicators of problems or a failing system include the following:

- Sewage backup into the house
- Frozen pipes or soil treatment areas
- System alarms sounding
- Algal blooms and excessive plant growth in nearby ponds or lakes
- Sewage odors indoors or outdoors
- Water or sewage surfacing in the yard or a ditch
- High levels of nitrates or coliform bacteria in well water tests

System failure is most commonly the result of improper design or installation of the system, overuse of water in the home, or lack of proper maintenance.

Improper Design or Installation

This may be the result of mistakes made by the professionals when the system was installed. It is also possible that the wrong system was chosen for the site and soil conditions (for example, high water table, shallow bedrock) or that the residence has been modified to house more people or to use fixtures or appliances that the system was not designed for or sized to handle.

Overuse of Water

The typical Minnesota resident (man, woman, or child) uses about 100 gallons of water per day. Systems are sized for typical water use, but abnormally high usage or accidental overuse (such as from leaky fixtures) can quickly overload the system. A system partially damaged from improper maintenance may not be able to treat even typical volumes of water. This situation often occurs when a home of one or two people

is sold to a family of five or six causing water use to increase dramatically.

Improper maintenance

The solids that accumulate in the septic tank must be removed regularly. If excessive scum or sludge builds up, it will begin to enter the soil treatment area and over time will plug it. It is recommended that a septic tank be cleaned (pumped) through the manhole, removing all solids, every one to three years. Cleaning frequency depends on several factors, including the number of people in the home, the size of the tank, and the use of a garbage disposal. The complete removal of solids from the tank requires flushing and back-flushing between the tank and the truck several times.

Addendum II: Septic System Operation and Maintenance Tips

This factsheet talks about septic systems and wells: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lJkfRdP4aHhV4Z00VgXokvmiPln_02HS/view

Control water use

- Repair all leaky faucets, fixtures, and appliances immediately.
- Install low water use fixtures and appliances (especially toilets and shower heads).
- Do not empty roof drains and sump pump water into the septic system.
- Wash only full loads of clothing and dishes.
- Reduce length of showers and number of toilet flushings.
- Reroute water softener discharge water out of the septic system.
- Spread water use, such as laundry, evenly throughout the day and week.

Eliminate harmful products from the system

- Reduce or eliminate use of harsh cleaners, disinfectants, detergents, and bleach.
- Dispose of solvents, paints, and unwanted medications through other means.

- Keep grease, lint, food particles, cigarette butts, paper towels, disposable diapers, coffee grounds, feminine hygiene products, plastics, and other solid products out of the system.
- Use only necessary amounts of liquid non-phosphorus detergents and cleaners.

Do not use additives

It is not necessary to use additives to enhance the performance of a properly operating system. If the level of bacterial activity is low, it is because disinfectants and other products are killing them. Reduce or eliminate the use or disposal of these products in the system to allow the bacteria to re-establish. Some additives cause solids to become suspended in the liquids. These solids will end up in the drain field, causing significant damage.

Regularly clean/pump and inspect the septic tank

The septic tank must be cleaned or pumped regularly to remove all solids. Never go into the septic tank. It lacks oxygen and contains dangerous gasses.

- Always clean the tank through the manhole (20- to 24-inch opening).
- Always use a licensed professional.
- Be sure all solids are removed (flush and back-flush).
- Inspect the baffles to be sure they are in place and functioning properly.

Maintain pumps and filters properly

- All pumps and motors should be routinely checked for proper operation.
- Replace weak or faulty pumps and motors.
- Install and clean lint filters on laundry equipment.
- Clean or replace effluent filters regularly.
- Attend to alarms on pumps and filters immediately.

Protect the soil treatment area

- Mow but do not fertilize or water turf grasses.
- Keep heavy vehicles (cars, tractors, snowmobiles, etc.) off soil treatment area.
- Do not place gardens, swing sets, or sand boxes over this area.
- Do not plant trees and shrubs on or close to this area.
- Maintain stands of appropriate plants on constructed wetland sites.

Addendum III: Protecting our water takes good drinking water and septic systems

There is growing concern about new chemicals in our groundwater, drinking water, lakes, rivers and streams. These “chemicals of emerging concern” (CEC) include products we use every day around our homes—cleaning products, over-the-counter medicines, and pharmaceuticals.

Read our CEC factsheet for more information