CHANGE COURSE

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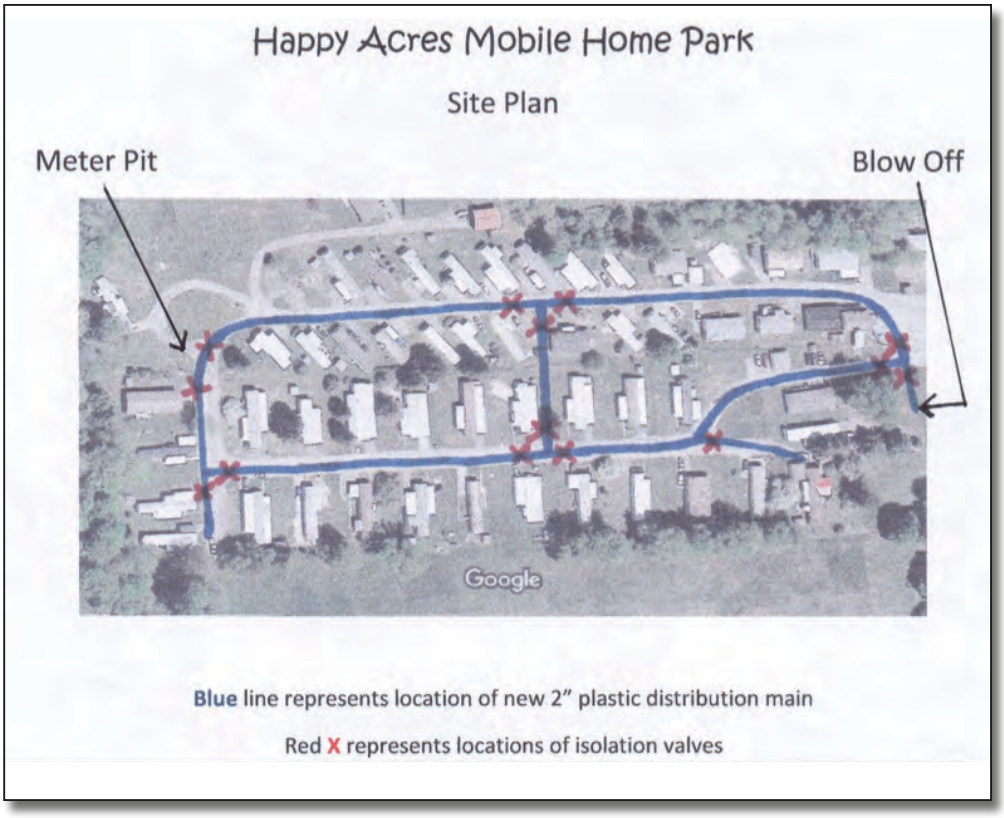
It was dark. The ship had been being tossed by the waves throughout the night. The storm was at its peak when the first mate spotted a light at the bow of the ship. He informed Captain Sparrow immediately. The old captain, who had weathered many a storm, was asleep in his quarters. Being a seasoned veteran, the captain asked if the light was steady or moving. Knowing that if the light was veering off to the starboard or port side, all would be well. However, if the light stayed steady at the bow they were on a collision course and something needed to be done. The first mate watched the light for a moment and afterwards informed the captain that it was steady. Captain Sparrow ordered a message be sent to the oncoming vessel that they should change course. Radio equipment was down, so the first mate sent the message via Morse code. Moments later a message came back simply saying, "You change course." Upon hearing the response, Captain Sparrow stormed up to the bridge. Looking out at the bow of the ship he spotted the oncoming light. "Signal them that I am a Captain with the United States Navy, I'm ordering you to change course." The message went out. Moments later came the response. "Nice to meet you captain, I too am with the Navy. This is my first assignment. You change course…Sir." The captain was livid. How dare this recruit tell him, a seasoned veteran, what to do. He then barked out his final order. "Signal them that this is a battleship, change course OR ELSE!" The message went out. Moments later came the response. "Sir, I respect your position and I respect your authority, but Sir, please, this is the lighthouse, you change course or else…" Can you imagine the look on the old captain's face?

Among the many services we provide here at New York Rural Water Association, one of them is leak detection. We spend many hours locating leaks across the state. Recently, I was at Happy Acres Mobile Home Park in Small Town USA doing just that. (Yes, the story is true but the names have been changed to protect the innocent) "Ron", the owner of the park, informed me that his water bills from the Village of Small Town have increased significantly. In 2015, the water cost for his 54 unit park was $18,817.12. Ron had just purchased the park a few years ago and was concerned about this unexpected cost. He contacted me and asked if I would assist him with a plan to address this problem. I was impressed with Ron's desire to be proactive and develop a sustainable plan of action. Our first step was to locate the parks water meter and see what the flow rate was, which we found to be 11.5 gallons per minute. It was 2:00 p.m. when we did this calculation. Typically most residents are not home at this hour and water use would normally be low. If you were to do the math, this would calculate out to 6,044,400 gallons per year. In 2015, the park was billed for 6,456,000 gallons. A difference of only 411,600. Using an average of 3 people per unit in the 54 unit park, and an average of 60 gallons per person per day, this calculates out to an **estimated** yearly use of 3,547,800 gallons. This is a considerable difference in the amount of water actually used in 2015. Though there are many variables when it comes to estimating water use, you can see that the parks usage was 2,908,200 gallons per year above what would typically be considered average. At $2.91 per thousand gallons this calculates out to $8,462.86 in additional yearly cost. I can see Ron's concern. We then went from home to home listening for leaks. We found several of them throughout the park. Ron hired a contractor to begin making repairs. After exposing the distribution main we found it to be an old 2" galvanized line. As you can see from the picture below the condition of this main is to say the least, poor. *(Look in the center of the picture)*

It's time to replace the entire system, which was my advice to Ron. He asked that I assist him with a plan to do just that. After doing all the research and coming up with an estimate to replace his old galvanized line with a 2" plastic line, trace wire, isolations valves, a blow off, as well as, install curb boxes and meters at each unit, (I'll get back to this later) I sat down with Ron to give him the news. Bottom line, the estimated cost was $119,103. Upon hearing this, Ron's eyes popped from their sockets and landed on the table right in front of me. Something I have never seen before in my entire life. I gently picked them up and returned them to >>>

their place and told Ron to breath. After he regained his composure he asked, "How am I going to come up with that kind of money?" Let's get back to the meters. Currently Ron is bearing the expense for the water supply at the park. I propose that he meter each unit and charge each resident for the water they use. Keep in mind that in 2015 the cost for water was $18,817. Not to mention the $13,000 plus dollars that Ron spent repairing leaks, bringing his total yearly cost to nearly $32,000. Are you starting to see the picture? At this rate in 4 years' time you're looking at $128,000. A 4 year payback. Ok, I know what you're thinking, it always looks good on paper but in reality things don't always work out the way you plan. Ok, you got me on that one. Let's take another look at the picture of the old 2" galvanized line. The reality is that this line has long outlived its lifespan. We didn't even dare to touch it for fear that it would disintegrate in our hand. It's only a matter of time. Let's try to put some reality into this sustainability plan. The estimated cost to install meters alone came to $46,010. This includes materials and labor. Installing meters and charging each unit for the water they use would free Ron from the expense of the water and in time provide him with the revenue to make the much needed repairs. Not only that but I believe it would also promote water conservation on the part of the residence. Let's face it, if you give people "free" water, its nothing to them to let it run 24 – 7 during those winter months to keep pipes from freezing, all the while ringing up your bill. This means Ron would now have $18,817 dollars to invest in water meters. Multiply that times 3 years and it comes to a grand total of $56,451. More than enough to pay for the meters. Now he can start saving for the much needed water line replacement. A sustainability plan may not be an immediate fix all, but rather a plan to address the issues in a timely and organized fashion. Things will not always work out exactly as you plan and you can expect little surprises to pop up along the way. But then again, ignoring the problem isn't going to make it go away either. Whether you are a park owner like Ron, or an operator of a water or wastewater system, recognizing the issues that you face and developing a plan to address these issues in a timely and organized fashion is a good first step to developing a sustainability plan. I heard it once said that if you do what you've always done, you'll get what you've always gotten. Ron knows all too well that spending money trying to make repairs on a system that has long outlived it expected life span, is only a waste of time and revenue.



Yes, it is a time consuming and expensive endeavor, but we have to start somewhere. Let's not be asleep in our quarters like Captain Sparrow. It's time to *"change course"* for good of our ship. 💦💦💦