



HAGUE AND THE SUSTAINABILITY PLAN PROCESS

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Sustainable system management. It seems many are talking about it. But what does it mean? How do you achieve it? Simply put, a sustainable system provides a desired level of service to its customers at a fair and reasonable cost. There are many ways to achieve a sustainable system, one of which is by using the Rural and Small Systems Guidebook to Sustainable Utility Management, aka “Workshop in a Box” (WIAB). One system, the Town of Hague, used the WIAB process to evaluate their performance in ten key management areas as well as to develop and implement a plan to improve lower performance areas.

Like so many municipalities with water infrastructure, the Town of Hague was facing challenges to its sustainable livelihood. How they got to that point is not really that important. What is of importance is how they approached the sustainability issue and the steps they have taken to improve overall system sustainability.

The first step Hague took was to create an asset management committee. With the New York Rural Water Association (NYRWA) as facilitator, the committee was selected, consisting of the Town Supervisor, the Secretary to the Supervisor, Sewer Board Member, the treatment plant Chief Operator, two sewer district residents, and an engineer from the Lake George Keeper Association. The last three members of this committee were critical to the success of the process. These members represent the public, the people who will ultimately support and fund the sustainability plan.

The first committee meeting was a general informational meeting. Future meetings were scheduled (once a month for no more than two hours), goals were discussed and the WIAB process was explained. At the end of the meeting the committee members were given their first homework assignment. In preparation for the next meeting, each member was to complete the self assessment worksheet. The members were encouraged to complete the self assessment as individuals, not as a group. Individual opinions to the ten key management areas were the goal.

At the next meeting the self assessments were discussed. What was expected to take about an hour, took almost the entire two hour meeting. A lively discussion of the individual committee members rating and ranking of the ten key management areas led to a master assessment sheet, the basis for the sustainability plan development.

The next few meetings were equally productive. The committee put a link to an asset management page on the Town of

Hague’s website. Meeting minutes as well as other pertinent asset management committee information is posted and updated as needed. Key management area improvement activities, based on the master assessment sheet, continued with the same lively discussion process as the assessment process. One of the most remarkable moments came when one of the district residents stated that the system had not been funded properly since the beginning. The Town gained valuable advocates by having sewer district residents on the committee. These members can inform their peers of the issues facing the Town without being seen as an elected official.

A sustainability plan developed using the improvements activities identified in previous meetings. Actions and objectives were developed, timelines and milestone benchmarks established, and review processes initiated. The sustainability plan was approved by the Town Board. The plan is being implemented through the asset management committee. As of this writing several objectives have already been met.

The Town of Hague took a giant step forward by developing the sustainability plan, and an even larger step by implementing the plan. If you are interested in developing a sustainability plan please contact us at 518-828-3155. 💧💧💧