

## Mason County Onsite Sewage Advisory Committee

### Meeting Minutes for 12/13/2022

- 1. Call to order:** 5:03 pm at Public Works
- 2. Roll call and determination of Quorum (6 required)**  
Present: Constance Ibsen, Ian Tracy, James Medcalf, Rhonda Thompson, Thad Bamford, Jim Henry, Kim Delany, Dave Killoran, Keith Fuller
- 3. Guest Introductions:** Cindy Waite, Teri King
- 4. Review & Approval of 09/13/2022 minutes:** Constance clarified an excerpt from page 2 of previous minutes where she was quoted "Airbnb permitting should require limits on the number of bedrooms", she actually meant there should be a required limit on guests/occupants.

Clarification was sought for Rhonda saying they have removed O/M requirement from flowchart because it is not something they have been requiring. Cindy said this is good to require for new owners, and asked Rhonda to explain further. Rhonda explained that it is a recording that gets filed by parcel and says that septic systems require annual operations and inspections, so as an annual O/M is already required, this is simply an additional recording for a special circumstance. Cindy explained previous requirements for O/M for any alternative system, which was relinquished due to being in the state WAC and says when the systems are supposed to be in O/M. The price has doubled in a couple of years and has become costly at \$200 currently. Constance acknowledged that it has gotten expensive and asked if this is not a blanket requirement but just for sensitive or special situations. Rhonda confirmed that it is in fact for special, case-by-case basis. Constance then suggested to include that this is a case-by-case basis in the minutes so that we know sometimes it is done.

Afterward, James Medcalf motioned to accept the minutes with Thad Bamford seconding the motion.

- 5. Public Comment:** Teri King acknowledged that by next quarter we will be seeing shellfish downgrades and issues and she would like this group to know about these things. She stated that briefings on worksites shared to this group would be very beneficial. When acknowledging emergency closings for shellfish, a specific site in Harstine Island came to mind when wondering how to prevent an emergency closure from happening again. She highlighted that with O/M installers being the professionals, there could be an excellent partnership in ensuring that we have the best system possible and prevent this from happening again as it causes economic harm to the area, neighboring beaches, and the tribe.

Ian was familiar with this Harstine Island property, a house with a pump on the beach that can only move sewage from the house with the tank. Cindy said she was the one who approved this site, and that was the only way they could get sewage out of their drain field. Teri concluded that this is a situation we do not want to see happen again, as it's important for harvest that we

don't impede on anyone's rights to their business. Ian added that this situation is not something that would happen again today, as this is a legacy situation that we are stuck with – this same thing would not be approved and constructed in current times. Teri acknowledged that this was great to hear, and that it would be a good idea to have this information in the metafile with the assessor's office.

- 6. County Updates:** Ian started with the first bit of news, sharing that employee Luke Cencula has resigned and taken a job with Washington State Department of Ecology. This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> employee to leave in 2 months. A position is open, and we are taking applications, and hoping to fill from the round of applicants from the prior vacancies.

Ian stated the next update which was concerning the by-laws for the Mason County Onsite Sewage Advisory Committee. He stated that the by-laws are not valid, as the by-laws were signed by the committee members and the code says it needs to be signed by the Board of Health. This has been an issue since at least '95, and maybe in the next meeting or two we can bring in the by-laws and discuss if any changes are to be made, if no changes then we can bring them forward to the Board of Health for them to sign it.

Rhonda presented an update with some numbers as far as septic permits, in 2021 we had 704 septic permits and this year (2022) we only have 603 as of today (December 13<sup>th</sup>, 2022) so we are slower than last year and we are pretty caught up on building permits and as-builts, so hopefully we can stay caught up as Luke leaves and we try to fill that position. Changes are going to be made up front in the office with the Clerical staff, we will no longer be routing as-builts with install fees not yet paid – it should be paid before starting install. Next, we are doing a deficiency mailing starting January with 950 letters to be mailed out. We will be doing about 100 letters sent per week and putting extension 400 on the letters and EH for email. We will be trying to direct people to OnlineRME and including their deficient report in the mailed letter so they will know exactly what they need to do. We will be using clerical staff to field many of the calls and will be encouraging customers to contact their providers first.

Keith asked for clarification as to whether an as-built is accepted with or without an install fee. He addressed that it is problematic to have pending (as-builts not routed back to EH due to non-paid install fee) as-builts left with clerical with a possibility of getting lost while waiting for fees to be paid. Down the line, say 4 years later, someone would come to request a copy of the as-built and it would be nowhere to be found and long past a period of resolving.

Cindy stated that smartgov does not display if a fee has been paid and if that was resolved it would be incredibly helpful.

- 7. Old Business:** Rhonda got feedback from Paula. Rhonda added in the sentence that Paula was suggesting under low impact expansion, septic system needs O/M, as-built, level b, the disposal unit must consist of a non-failing drainfield, deep trench or dry well. Cindy asked if this flow chart would be in the policies, and Rhonda confirmed that they will be.

Cindy asked if the policies were approved, acknowledging that Alex rewrote them, and Cindy did not see where it was approved - the whole manual. Ian replied that the whole policy manual is not adopted by code, and that document is not one of the ones referenced by our code, so things within the manual can be bent or swayed considering the specific situation it is addressing. Ian explained that the purpose of the document is to allow someone in Rhonda's situation to figure out what to do as they come in, when referring to the as-built section. Constance asked if this document was a policy manual for those processing the paperwork, and Ian confirmed yes, and it is for all EH so it covers all aspects.

Constance asked if a motion of approval was needed to approve this in order to present this to the board of health, and she was told yes.

Kim made a motion to accept the policy, seconded by Keith. All were in favor and accepted the policy at 6:11 pm, it will now be forwarded to board of health for review.

8. **New business:** Cindy said that she would like to know if repairs are given priority as sometimes, she feels they are not so she would like to know a bit about that. She also addressed the wait time of 72 hours for a finalized, stating it is unfair for the installers to have to keep a piece of equipment planted at a site for up to 3 days for a backfill and wanted to explore finding a possible solution to prevent this situation.

Ian replied that the cost and members of staff we would need to final everything is just not feasible, especially given the vacancies in the department right now.

James asked for clarification on why the 72-hour wait is a policy and asked if it really takes that long to know whether or not they will be coming out to a site for inspection. Rhonda replied that unfortunately it is day 3 that they really determine whether they will make it or not.

Cindy referred to past processes where they would call in to the county on the first day of install, and the county would come out the first day whether they be setting tanks or in a different process, and this also gave the inspectors a solid look at how these systems were being installed versus going to an inspection when the system has been completely installed and they cannot see what is going on underground. She also mentioned that the state requires the DOH to only be there for 1 visit. She said that the responsibility went back to the designer, and that's not how it used to be. They quit doing the 3 days because an installer would call and say they are starting, and an inspector would show up to find that they had not started at all. Rhonda said that she would consider changing to 48 hours.

James added that he would like to see inspectors on site mid-construction, as they would get to see more of where something might be cheated, and if he notifies you he is starting, the inspectors clock starts to be able to come out at any time. Rhonda expressed that when visiting a site, she wants to see where a drain field is being installed, not when tanks are being put in. Cindy replied that you will see more of what's going on if you guys visited during install versus after complete install process. Thad added that he thinks the designer should be the one that

everything's gone back to, the designer being responsible for install, and the county is out there one time to inspect holes and the layout of a design – so he doesn't know if it is a liability issue from the county or if it can be looked at like OK, we are facilitating.

Ian said that we have needed the 72-hour period when there have been major issues on installs. And while he doesn't like the 72-hour wait, he doesn't know what a current compromise would be with his lack of staff and the cost it would take to have all inspections done on demand. He stated that if we did that, it would increase fees for that work, and empathized that it was a complicated issue that would require a cost analysis to see what it would really take for this to be done. James replied that cost of waiting might have to start to reflect on his customers or that they will have to start having to be paid a fee to purchase more equipment while their current equipment sits there for that 72-hour period unused.

Dave asked what is wrong with an appointment system of some kind? James acknowledged that he can call a designer and communicate, set a time of day and see follow-through with the designer and then have to wait on the county for 3 days with an unknown time to show up. Ian expressed that he understands these issues and he is sympathetic to it, but he doesn't know the current best option to resolve this and will have to think about what works for everybody. With the consistent staffing issues in his department, he is unsure on how he can utilize his staff to look at all of the sites. He mentioned that Dave's (Windom) desire is to have us look at all of them, but he doesn't know what his idea is on the turnaround time to make that happen, for example. He mentioned that our installers list is also the longest it has ever been in over 20 years, adding complications to the matter.

Rhonda went back to the original question, and said yes, we prioritize repairs, and we always do.

Jim addressed that he has been facing opposition from installers not wanting to fill out the installation checklist for the final asbuilt. Jim feels that it should be in the installer filling out the checklist and signing, then sending to the designer for final approval with record drawing. Rhonda said the county does not have any policy around this and we are just looking for both the installer signature and designer stamp on the same asbuilt document to approve. Ian said it should be between each installer and designer to determine who will fill out the checklist.

**Close of meeting:** Close of meeting by Jim Henry, seconded by Dave, adjourned at 6:38 pm

**Next meeting:** March 14<sup>th</sup> 2022, in person at Public Works