

ORANGE COUNTY COMMISSION WORKSHOP – MARCH 6, 2018

Thank you for holding this workshop and providing an opportunity for homeowners to address our concerns with the commission. You have a handout prepared for you that hopefully will provide you with background information and more detail than 3 minutes will allow.

First a story. Everglades City was entirely on a sewer variation called grinder systems. When power failed during Irma, raw sewage backed up into homes and yards. Two people died, and several people lost limbs from infections caused by exposure to raw sewage. The property damage was catastrophic. When proposed, grinders were touted to be “safer” than septic systems .

Another story for you. Several years ago, Charlotte County, an environmentally conscious community, mandated “advanced” treatment units. Like the grinder systems, they were viewed as an alternative to conventional septic systems that created less pollution. In 2010 the mandate was rescinded citing frequent mechanical failures, expensive permitting fees and maintenance contracts, contractor service failures, and complete lack of data to demonstrate performance. In all the county decided the complex systems created an undue burden on the homeowner.

BMAP, as it is presently written allows two choices: sewers or advanced treatment units. Grinder sewer systems and advanced septic systems require homeowner provided electricity to operate and both will negatively impact homeowners.

- After Irma, Governor Scott said all lift stations and wastewater treatment plants, the sewage source, must have backup power to avoid massive sewage spills experienced during the hurricane. If the homeowner is responsible for providing power to their sewage treatment operation, Is the county prepared to provide homeowners with generators for grinder systems or the advanced onsite systems? Is the county prepared to deal with the life risks posed by thousands of homeowners storing gasoline and operating generators on their property?

Even though the Dept. of Health was given five million dollars to develop a passive, nitrogen reducing alternative to conventional septic systems, we do not have one. Even though there is ample evidence that a simple layer of woodchips under the drainfield accomplishes the same result as a so-called “advanced” system, the Dept. of Health is not making truly passive alternatives available to us.

Please remember that the capital cost, the price of an advanced, aerobic system only represents a fraction of the total costs. Just like your car, repairs and maintenance add as much as 50% or more to the total cost of ownership. Ask any contractor who services these units. For those homeowners on fixed or even moderate income, these costs will prove devastating. Please remember also, there is no such thing as unintended consequences – there are overlooked or ignored consequences.

Bottom line for homeowners: If we do not learn from our mistakes, tragic mistakes and unworkable mistakes, such as the stories I’ve told you, we are doomed to repeat them.

Our position is simply this: **Any solution that requires electricity, whether electrically powered grinder sewers or advanced septic systems, lowers property values, does not function in severe weather events, impacts how families must live, and is subject to frequent mechanical failure. Homeowners’ health, finances, property, and property values are at risk. Traditional gravity sewers are the only acceptable solution.**

As always, I am available to you for more conversation. Thank you again for your time and consideration of our concerns.

Andrea Samson