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High School Water Solution: Well Drilled by Clark?

WILLIAMSTOWN, Mass., Nov. 29, 2004 -- The Williamstown Citizens for Informed Decisions, a study group analyzing the Town's water-main bond proposal, called today for renewed testing of a well, drilled by the Clark, on Mt. Greylock Regional High School land, to determine its potential for meeting the school's water needs.

The well was drilled last year during a search for a new water supply for the art conservation center planned for a neighboring parcel. Preliminary tests showed that the well yielded insufficient amounts for the Clark, the Northern Berkshire expansion, and Mt. Greylock combined. However, the well may provide more than enough water for the school.

The study group stated that its review of the drilling logs shows that after a short pumping test, the Clark Art Institute eliminated the well - designated No. 2 - from further consideration because it did not produce the 60 gallons per minute (gpm) indicated as the combined need for the high school, the new art conservation lab, and the 68 condominiums to be added to the Sweetwood retirement complex.

After inspecting the driller's reports and consulting hydrology professionals, the citizens study group also contacted W. Gordon Gould Inc., driller of Well No. 2. They learned that testing of the well was discontinued prior to collecting enough data to settle questions about the well's suitability as a source of some or all of the water required by the school.

“Abundant flow” in range of 10-15 gpm

The Gould drilling company indicated that at a depth of 693 feet in Well No. 2, they encountered a flow of water so abundant that it interfered with the operation of their air hammer. A field pump test conducted at only 300 feet showed that flow from the well was likely in the range of 10 to 15 gpm. No pump test was performed at a lower depth because a larger pump would have been necessary, and none were available, and so testing was not pursued further.

Water from Well No. 2 has not been tested for perchlorate, the substance found in Mt. Greylock's water last spring that caused the school to turn to bottled water for drinking and cooking. The well is located in the woods about fifteen hundred feet west of the school's current two wells, which are adjacent to the school, and were drilled to depths of only 180 and 380 feet 40 years ago. Thus, well #2 is much deeper, and much further from the school than are the existing wells.

"More detailed evaluation of Well No. 2 is an example of the kind of homework that should have been done before Town Meeting. As we consider our options for the school, both a formal pump test and a complete water quality profile should be done on the well," said David Dethier, a geosciences professor at Williams College.

Professor Dethier also noted that the driller's report shows that Well No. 2 was not "hydrofractured", a method that widens underground rock fractures to increase a well's capacity. "This is a standard technique that often increases well yield," said Dethier.

Driller's reports show that the two additional wells drilled in 2003 by the Clark Art Institute were hydrofractured.

Well not considered as source for school only

The high school did not investigate the well on its own and was apparently unaware of the details of the data regarding this well. "When I asked the school for the report on the wells drilled on school property, I was told they did not have a copy," said resident Andy Hogeland who spent time researching the school's water options. "The school had been told that none of the wells met the flow requirement for all three institutions, but there seems to have been no meaningful assessment of whether the well could meet some or all of the needs of just the school."

The school's water needs for drinking and cooking have not been precisely identified, but the School Committee in September reported that the school uses an average of 30 gallons (six 5-gallon containers) of bottled water per day. The study group concludes that even if Well No. 2 produces only 10-12 gpm when pumped steadily, it will probably prove sufficient for supplying at least the school's drinking and cooking water. In that event, the current wells could continue to serve as the source for other uses and the water from Well No. 2 could supply water for human consumption.

Seek state money to finish and connect well?

Mt. Greylock has already been authorized to use up to \$286,000 from the Dept. of Education's emergency fund to pay the full amount needed for a connection to the proposed waterline. "We would urge the School Committee to take preliminary steps for applying to the state emergency fund to fully cover the costs for an alternative method for providing safe drinking water for Mt. Greylock. This would include further tests and permitting of Well No. 2 and any necessary pumps and pipes to convey the water from this well to the school building," added study group member Nancy Nysten.

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(Submitted by: Andy Hogeland)