

PHCA Doherty Council T&E Committee Testimony re: 10-Year Water and Sewer Plan

I am here today representing hundreds of homeowners in Glen Hills and my neighborhood, Potomac Highlands. We are asking for three changes in the revision of the Water and Sewer Plan. They are:

1. Remove the requirement for a failed septic system before a neighborhood group can request a sanitary sewer study to identify specific needs of their area for sewer service.
2. Resume the North Potomac Highlands Septic Survey and take appropriate action.
3. Implement the County-mandated requirement for a limited master plan amendment as required in Resolution 18-423.

Here is the rationale for our community's requests.

1. In 2018, the Montgomery County Council made a change to a provision of resolution 18-423 that imposed a requirement for a DEP-verified septic failure before requesting an area sanitary sewer survey. This change, sponsored by then Council Member, Mark Elrich, narrowly passed by one vote without serious discussion of the issues. It effectively gutted the Resolution's intended support for property owners in Glen Hills neighborhoods such as mine. We are here today asking that the Council remove the requirement for a DEP finding of a failed septic system before a septic survey can be initiated. Planning and executing a sewer project to replace aging septic systems that are close to failure and are a public health hazard takes many years and lots of money that the homeowners must provide. Waiting for a demonstrated failure before studying the problem is ridiculous. Most of the homes in our Potomac Highlands neighborhood were built between 1955 and 1967 and have pre-1975 septic systems using seepage pits. We need options for replacement.

The need for these studies was clearly demonstrated by another study completed before the requirement changed. This survey of the south Overlea drive portion of our neighborhood showed that 82% of the 16 studied properties would not be able to replace septic systems. The Council approved sewer service category changes to S3, allowing the owners to begin planning for sewer. This complicated process managed entirely by the homeowners is still ongoing five years later. This experience demonstrates why homeowners in this area need access to studies long before their systems actually fail.

2. Today, we also ask for a revision of the draft Water and Sewer Plan to include a requirement for completion of the North Potomac Highlands Septic Survey and transmit recommendations for consideration by the Council. The amendment to Resolution 18-423 was used as a pretext for DEP to stop the North Potomac Highlands Septic Survey, that was begun in October of 2017 with results presented in a public hearing. Results showed that virtually all of those 28 property owners would not be able to replace failed or failing septic systems. No further action has been taken by the Council. These property owners deserve your support to allow service where necessary.
3. Finally, the Council must support the 18-423-mandated requirement for a limited master plan that addresses the needs identified in the 2013 Glen Hills Study. According to the Resolution, "The limited master plan amendment will amend the Glen Hills section of the plan based on the 2013 Sanitary Study performed by DEP. It also states: "The Limited Master Plan Amendment should **consider planning approaches and tools that are designed to address the impact of development on the watershed while reconciling the septic and sewer issues in the area.** The directive in this Resolution is clear, yet County Council members continue to obstruct measures that will meet clearly identified needs of our community.