

# **Village of Bethalto officials hold meeting for input, work to resolve piping, drainage issues**

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August 10 2016 1:55 PM





**BETHALTO** - A special meeting was held Tuesday evening to address something very important to the residents of Bethalto - flooding.

The meeting was held in the auditorium of **Civic Memorial High School Tuesday** evening, and featured several village officials, including **Bethalto Mayor Alan Winslow and Bethalto Public Works Director Rod Cheatham.**

Members of the community were invited to attend so they could ask questions and hear about the work the Village of Bethalto is currently doing to remedy the excessive flooding caused by heavy rains. Winslow and Cheatham blamed the antiquity of the village's current wastewater infrastructure for the problems, and spoke about ways they are going to solve those problems, some of which could take as long as a decade.

Cheatham spoke about "pretty horrific rainstorms with horrible results," including flooding last December as well as torrential rains falling in July, which flooded several residents of Bethalto. Cheatham agreed that flooding and the rains were out of the ordinary, but added that was not an excuse for the catastrophic failure of infrastructure several residents experienced.

"I don't accept it, and the trustees don't accept it," he said. "It will take some time for the results."

The problem under the streets of Bethalto is archaic infrastructure. Much of the piping and drainage systems are more than 50 years old. The system includes clay tiles and has been both separated and infiltrated by water. The village sent cameras into the piping to survey their conditions. Due to the crumbling infrastructure, the village's 13 pump stations often go under during especially heavy rainfalls. Those stations are not designed for the influx, Cheatham said, which causes water to back up in homes without back flow prevention devices."

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To fix some of the existing infrastructure issues, Cheatham said the village will be utilizing "cured-in-place piping (CIPP)," which will basically create a new pipe within an existing pipe.

"It's pretty cost-effective, but it's still pretty costly," he said. "It is pretty quick."

The Village of Bethalto allocated \$250,000 in funding for the CIPP method this year.

"It doesn't get a whole lot of lines," Winslow said. "But it will get us started. Just because we won't be in your neighborhood, doesn't mean you won't see the benefits soon."



While the entire project may take as long as a decade, with a projected minimum completion time of eight years, Winslow and Cheatham said positive results may be more immediate, as relieving pressure from one part of the piping may cause other parts of it to have less problematic conditions.

Winslow said the new infrastructure fixes may cost money at first, but will ultimately save the village money in regards to water treatment from Alton and insurance claims. He did warn, however, torrential rains like those seen in December 2015 may never be able to fully be combated.

"There's probably no town, village or city which can handle seven and a half inches in an hour," Cheatham said.

The Village of Bethalto will also try proactive methods of preventing rushing waters from flowing into the storm drains in the first place. While taking care of ditches is supposed to be the responsibility of the homeowners, Winslow said the village will assist in cleaning them in the interest of providing less problems for infrastructure.

"The faster we get the water out of our city, the faster you can get back to your normal lives," he said. "We have been overwhelmed with leaves, sticks and brush, which have been taken to the streets. There's no way we can get to all the brush in town in a timely fashion."

Winslow said the pick-up has cost the village up to \$180,000 a year, and they are running out of places to put the yard waste. While they are currently searching for a solution, one has yet to be found.

"This is caused by decades of neglect," Winslow said. "It is our responsibility to fix it. We pay a lot of money for insurance, for those who have experienced losses, you do have the option to file a claim with our insurance company."

The village switched to Gallagher Insurance roughly eight months ago, and is working with them to develop a rapport and system to deal with the overwhelming claims caused by flooding.

Attaining a loan from the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency was also not out of the question, Winslow said. When asked about possible grants to solve the crisis, Winslow said those grants are usually earmarked for smaller rural communities with lower populations. He said, even if the village was magically given a million dollars to solve the issue, it would still require time and manpower.

"The problems were neglected for so long before me arriving on the scene," Winslow said. "I was not involved in those decisions. Whatever was done in the past is in the past. It's my job now to fix it."

Another issue affecting the current infrastructure is residents illegally discharging sumps and wastewater. Winslow said those offenders will be found through smoke-testing. Either smoke will be seen coming from their downspouts or they will call the fire department to report it, Winslow said.

"Either way, we're going to find them," he said.

The complete re-working of all the pipes may take as long as a decade, but most of it will take significantly less time, Winslow said. He asked for the patience of the village residents and told them to remember the village is aware of the situation and is taking significant steps to fix the problems.

"There's no magic wand or silver bullet for this problem," Cheatham said. "It didn't get here overnight and it won't go away overnight."