

Residents plagued with water woes

Written by Carol Pomeday

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Village officials advise one to install sump pump; another seeks legal action

You don't expect basements to flood in December, but that is what happened to two Belgium residents who asked village officials Monday to do something to remedy the problems.

Both homeowners were told the village is not responsible for their problems, but were offered possible solutions.

Sheryl Roberts, who has lived at 125 Maple St. for 30 years, said she never had water in her basement until failed developer Vern Hagstrom started work on a retention pond in a field behind her house, but didn't complete it, causing water problems on nearby properties. The land is now owned by Lyman Real Estate Liquidating Trust of Minnesota, which spent \$65,000 to lower the water level in the pond, install outlet drains and build berms to prevent flooding.

Recent sewer work by the village to correct infiltration and inflow problems in the sanitary sewer system made the situation even worse, Roberts said.

"Now, I'm paying for a new sewer and water line and supposedly there was a temporary fix in the field and it's worse than ever," Roberts said. "The berm sends water onto my property. He (Hagstrom) created this problem and walked away, and we're left with the problem. Nobody wants to take responsibility for the problem. "

On Christmas Day, Roberts said she had one inch of water in the basement. By the next day, the water was six inches high and she called the Public Works Department. Village crews pumped the water out of her basement and installed a temporary plug in the foundation drain in her house.

Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said the water in her basement is coming from the ground, not the sanitary sewer system. The groundwater was going into the sanitary sewer system before the line was reconstructed, he said.

"We had one field tile connected directly into the sanitary sewer," Birenbaum said.

The best solution, he said, is for Roberts to install a sump pump.

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“I’m on a fixed income. My neighbors have sump pumps and they’re running constantly,” she said. “It would just pump onto the yard and come right back in.”

A drain tile could be installed at the back of the property, but that would be more expensive, Birenbaum said.

Village President Kevin Kowalkowski said the village is not responsible and can only give Roberts suggestions. A letter sent in August describing the project stated that it might make matters worse for homeowners whose drain systems were contributing to the infiltration of stormwater into the sanitary sewer system.

“We’re not trying to pass the buck. We’re trying to find a solution for you,” Kowalkowski said. “In our eyes, the I&I (inflow and infiltration) problem is a \$1 million issue for this village. It’s shortening the life of our wastewater treatment plant.”

Roberts said her neighbors have spent thousands of dollars installing tiles around their houses and sump pumps that constantly run.

“All the water is ending up on my property,” she said.

She was given the names of companies that install sump pumps and a contact person for the company that owns the field.

Robert Knapp, 276 Dean Rd., said he’s spent more than \$3,000 trying to solve his water problem. Broken drain tiles, he said, allowed sand to get into his sump pump.

“I went through three sump pumps,” Knapp said. “The sump pumps run constantly. I have mold problems and sewage backups. It wasn’t that bad when I moved in. It just gradually got worse.”

Birenbaum said it’s not a problem the village has caused, but offered to televise the stormwater line to see if it is cracked.

Knapp, who purchased the house six years ago, said he’s contacted an attorney and is considering legal action against the developer, Kaereck Builders.