

Before we vote tonight, I want to take a few minutes to express my thoughts about the Scotts Corners Water District.

First, I want to thank the residents who took the time to submit comments, ask questions, and participate in this process. Infrastructure decisions are important, and they deserve thoughtful review, transparency, and fact-based discussion.

I also want to acknowledge something very important: I understand and respect that no property owner wants to face additional costs, particularly residents on fixed incomes. That concern is real. It is something this Town Board recognizes, and it is why we have worked so hard to secure outside funding.

But creating a water district requires us to look not only at individual circumstances, but also at the long-term health, environmental, and economic needs of the entire district and our community.

Recent criticism of the Scotts Corners Water District overlooks the extensive review, public process, and documented water quality issues that led the Town to pursue this important public health infrastructure project.

The reality is that the Scotts Corners business district has struggled with water quality challenges for decades.

Unlike most residential properties in Pound Ridge, where homes typically sit on two or more acres, the properties in Scotts Corners are much smaller. These parcels were developed generations ago with private wells and septic systems located close together.

That creates challenges.

Over time, Scotts Corners has experienced documented groundwater concerns involving various contaminants, including historic pollutants and more recently emerging contaminants such as PFAS. These issues create regulatory challenges for businesses and highlight that the existing model of relying indefinitely on individual wells is not a sustainable long-term solution.

This project is not about development.

This project is about drinking water.

The suggestion that this project was poorly planned ignores the decades of work that brought us here.

Recently, the Town evaluated multiple alternatives, including new wells and individual treatment options, before determining that connecting to an existing regulated public water supply was the most effective and responsible solution.

This project has gone through engineering evaluations, environmental review, public meetings, a referendum of property owners within the proposed district, review by the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation, and review by the Office of the State Comptroller.

The State of New York independently reviewed this project and awarded Pound Ridge a \$7.6 million Water Infrastructure Improvement Act grant, covering 70% of eligible construction costs.

These are highly competitive grants. They are not awarded to projects that lack merit, documentation, or a demonstrated public need.

The Office of the State Comptroller also completed its independent review and approved formation of the district. The length and detail of that review should not be viewed as evidence of concern. It reflects exactly what the process is designed to do, provide careful scrutiny before a municipality moves forward.

The Comptroller's review exists to protect taxpayers, and this project satisfied that review.

Some have suggested that the Town cannot create a public water system without simultaneously creating a sewer system or wastewater treatment plant.

That is simply not how infrastructure has historically been developed in communities like ours.

Northern Westchester communities routinely solve specific infrastructure challenges with targeted solutions.

We do not need to look very far for examples.

The Town of Bedford operates four separate water districts: the Consolidated Water District, the Farms Water District, the Old Post Road Water District, and the Cedar Downs Water District.

Those districts were created to provide public drinking water to specific areas. Bedford was not required to simultaneously construct a townwide sewer system or wastewater treatment plant.

Lewisboro has followed a similar approach, creating targeted water districts and community water systems while much of the town continues to rely on private wells and septic systems.

That is how communities like ours address infrastructure challenges.

We identify a problem, we create a solution for the area impacted, and we move forward responsibly.

Public water and wastewater are separate infrastructure decisions.

Today, businesses in Scotts Corners pump groundwater from private wells, use that water, and discharge wastewater through existing septic systems.

After this project, those same properties will receive treated public water, use that water, and continue utilizing existing wastewater systems.

The source of drinking water changes.

The wastewater system does not.

The suggestion that public water will automatically create excess water, raise the water table, and overwhelm septic systems misunderstands how these systems operate. Public water with private septic exists throughout New York

State and throughout communities very similar to ours like I just mentioned in Bedford and Lewisboro.

That does not mean wastewater planning is unimportant. It is important. The Town has studied wastewater options and will continue evaluating solutions that protect our environment and support the future of Scotts Corners.

But we should not ignore a drinking water issue today because there may be additional infrastructure improvements considered tomorrow.

Questions have also been raised regarding costs.

Claims that the Town ignored costs are simply incorrect.

The Town has been transparent that updated engineering, final design, bidding, and financing will determine final numbers. That is true of every infrastructure project.

What we have done is secure significant outside funding, and we will continue pursuing every available state and federal grant opportunity to minimize the financial impact on district property owners.

But there is another financial reality we need to acknowledge: delay itself has a cost.

Asking questions, conducting reviews, and performing due diligence are appropriate. That is exactly what has occurred throughout this process.

However, once those reviews are complete, continuing to delay necessary infrastructure does not freeze the cost.

Construction materials, labor, engineering, and financing costs continue to change over time. Waiting rarely makes public infrastructure less expensive.

We see this reality firsthand driving through Scotts Corners with the Pound Ridge Fire District firehouse expansion project. The project began with one set of cost assumptions, but as time passed and the project moved through approvals and construction, market conditions changed dramatically.

Inflation, labor costs, and material increases significantly impacted the final cost resulting in a call to raise more tax dollars to support it.

The lesson from that experience is not that communities should avoid investing in critical infrastructure. The lesson is that delaying necessary projects can also carry significant financial consequences.

For the Scotts Corners Water District, unnecessary delays could mean higher future construction costs, costs that would ultimately affect the very district property owners we are trying to protect.

It could also jeopardize an extraordinary funding opportunity: a \$7.6 million state grant covering 70% of eligible construction costs.

The responsible approach is not to rush.

And we have not rushed.

This project has been studied and reviewed for years by engineers, state agencies, regulators, residents, and this Board.

But there also comes a point when responsible government requires action.

Infrastructure decisions are rarely easy. They require balancing today's concerns with tomorrow's responsibilities.

Many of the improvements we all rely on, our roads, utilities, emergency services, parks, and environmental protections exist because previous generations were willing to make investments in the future.

Doing nothing does not remove contaminants from wells.

Doing nothing does not improve public health.

Doing nothing does not solve the reality that our historic business district is operating with infrastructure from another era.

Bedford recognized that targeted water districts were appropriate solutions for certain neighborhoods.

Lewisboro recognized the same.

Pound Ridge is now addressing the specific needs of Scotts Corners through the same proven approach.

The Scotts Corners Water District is about protecting public health, supporting our local businesses, addressing documented environmental concerns, and ensuring that the heart of Pound Ridge remains viable for decades to come.