

October 28, 2020 Public Meeting

Stewart Air National Guard (SANG) Restoration Advisory Committee (RAC)

Opening Comments by RAC Community Co-Chair, Chuck Thomas

When we initiated the RAC process for the SANG and City of Newburgh residents and stakeholders to collaborate on an investigative and restorative process we came in with the goal of securing a comprehensive and timely cleanup for our drinking water reservoir, and surrounding watershed, that serve +30K people.

To this end I want to thank the RAC members and our partners for their efforts over the past year. This is the 4th quarterly meeting of this process and my last meeting as your Community Co-Chair.

Working together we have created a culture of communication and collaboration and have crafted operating procedures allowing greater participation in both review and public participation.

Studies have been undertaken to better understand the sources of contamination and movement of contaminants through the area. This has begun to demonstrate varied and unexpected sources of pollution, new migration pathways and further exposures.

This is important to recognize and understand. It also important to recognize that the net result is that pollutants are primarily entering our drinking water source, Washington Lake, and our watersheds such as Silver Stream and Moodna creek through one venue, Recreation Pond.

Last winter a trial filtering system was placed at Rec Pond and it almost immediately failed due to clogging and the system being overwhelmed by area rainfall. Since that time there has been no apparent progress toward replacing that failed system with an adequate replacement system. We now are approaching another year without filtering taking place.

Why is this?

I am not looking for that answer now but rather pointing up that this needs to be addressed.

This unfiltered water is blocked from entering Washington Lake but that does not help the remediation of Washington Lake which is our ultimate goal.

Isn't it important to be filtering this water now? NY State will not be able to foot the bill indefinitely for our use of NYC's Clean Catskill Aqueduct water, which other PFAS affected communities are now tapping into. Meanwhile, we will not allow our community—that has already suffered nearly 3 decades of PFAS poisoning, to go back onto Washington Lake, knowing that our current filtration system can't filter out all PFAS. Furthermore, we want to prevent the continuing degradation of our streams that flow into America's River the Hudson, which serves as the drinking water for 7 other communities.

This is not the fault of the good folks in this virtual room but rather a system that seems to prioritize economics over health and safety.

Four years ago PFAS's were identified in our drinking water.

Four years ago the NYS DEC identified the problem and recommended solutions.

Our clean-up is being now penalized because we are not using Washington Lake as our drinking water source. The priority we have and had is our health and safety. We need to bring our collective and powerful voices to bear to expedite the clean-up process, approve funding for remedial investigation and move the clean-up forward.

The City of Newburgh did not willy nilly decide to stop using Washington Lake but rather was forced to stop supplying polluted drinking water to our citizens for their health and safety.

Now is the time to immediately raise our collective voices to fund and start remediation of Washington Lake, a water supply system predating the venerable NYC system and I call on this body to lead that call to action.

Thank you