

Your input is needed about the Sewer Initiative

A team of your neighbors from the Miner Lake Property Owners Association has been working to identify potential solutions for a community wastewater removal system.

In late 2021, American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds became available to Allegan Township. At that time, the Township board pledged up to \$460k to the Miner Lake sewer project. In 2022, they hired an engineering firm, Fleis & Vandenbrink, to do enough planning to apply for a USDA-RD loan/grant. In December 2024, the **Township Board voted to reallocate the ARPA funds and no longer support this initiative *unless there is concrete evidence of support from the property owners.***

Before you can indicate your support, you need to understand where we are in the process.

This mailing (and minerlake.org/sewer) have details about:

1. Our current situation
2. What we want
3. What we've learned
4. The happens next
5. What the cost is

A survey will be mailed to you in the upcoming weeks to **measure the level of support for completing our research of alternatives. This is NOT a mandate for installing sewers.**

If property owners show support in the survey, our plan is to present all work completed for those options at the Spring MLPOA Meeting (Saturday, May 24). Once completed, you will have time to evaluate the recommendations and formally vote on whether the recommended solution should move forward.

We have attached materials that will bring you up to date on where the project stands today and what more is needed to get a concrete plan with estimated costs, timing, any government funding programs, and the impact to you. If you have any questions about the project, please reach out to any team member. We will all be happy to speak to you.

Signed,

“The Sewer Task Force”

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Watch your mailbox for a survey, due back by Feb. 28
Visit www.minerlake.org/sewer for more information

Questions, Rumors, Unknowns, and Next Steps

Our Current Situation

Many current septic systems are past their planned lifecycle. Many more will be reaching the end of their useful lives within the next 10 years.

Most owners with small lots face the issue of not having enough space for a new septic field.

What We Want

Our 3 goals for sewer remain unchanged:

1. **Increased Freedom** for how you use your property.
2. **Long-term Solution** (and long payment plan)
3. **Higher Water Quality**

We also want to design the very best solution for as many residents as possible.

Many lake homeowners associations across SW Michigan (Gull Lake, Diamond Lake, Lake Doster, Gun Lake) have successfully implemented community wastewater systems that have resulted in greater homeowner freedom and materially cleaner lakes.

What We've Learned

We learned that this is complicated but not impossible. (If other lakes have done it, we can, too!)

Allegan Township contracted with Fleis & Vandenbrink to explore different types of systems. They initially developed 3 options. That's standard practice for any large-scale

project, especially one involving a municipality and possible USDA funding.

Options A, B, & C are described on the website.

While these 3 options were being drafted, the City of Allegan and Allegan Township were renegotiating the sewer agreement that governs Township residents (and would apply to us). This was a lengthy 18-month process and it significantly slowed the pace of our project.

During the contract negotiation delay, the Miner Lake Task Force, our engineers, and individual residents continued exploring options in every way possible.

In December 2024, Allegan Township withdrew their commitment of ARPA funds for the project because they assumed that preliminary cost estimates were too high to be of interest to lake residents. We disagree. The board's assumption ignored available funding and grants and was made without residents input.

What Happens Next

We want to continue to collect and evaluate alternatives. It may feel like we've been "collecting and evaluating" for *years*. We get it — it feels that way to us, too.

We're driven to look *a little longer* for the very best solution for as many residents as possible.

The 6-person task force is meeting weekly. We're in active conversation with different state and local partners including the Health Department, EGLE, multiple engineering firms, and treatment companies.

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It may look like we're a swan that's slowly gliding around the lake, but I promise you, our feet are churning rapidly under the surface.

Things are happening.

We also want to communicate resident interest to the Allegan Township Board at their March meeting. We will collect your feedback through an upcoming survey.

What it Will Cost

We *really* want to give you a number. And you may have heard some specific numbers for Options A, B, & C, which ranged from \$14mm to \$27mm.

One option (the most expensive one) was easy to eliminate since everyone agreed it wasn't an ideal solution for Miner Lake.

The engineering report from November 2022, marked PRELIMINARY DRAFT estimated about \$60,000 per household. However, that **did not include any discount or reductions from State or Federal sources**. The engineering firm was instructed to stop work on the project before this important step could be completed.

Additionally, a 4th option, one Allegan Township promised to consider in Sept. 2023, hasn't yet been evaluated or fully priced.

So the reason we can't tell you a cost is simply: ***We just don't know yet.***

And, even when we have a project cost estimate, that's not the *actual cost*. Ultimately, your "cost" depends on:

- The project cost
- Any available grants
- The financing terms

For those who like formulas, it you can think of it as:

$$\boxed{\text{Estimated Cost}} - \boxed{\text{Grants}} \times \boxed{\text{Financing Terms}} = \boxed{\text{Actual Cost}}$$

In addition to the installation cost, there will also be **monthly operating costs**.

If our solution involves sending the waste to the City of Allegan for treatment, we're bound by the negotiated contract between the City and the Township (the renegotiation which created an 18-month delay in our USDA application). The City of Allegan would have full control over when residents are required to hookup, treatment rates, and future rate increases.

There are treatment options that don't involve the City of Allegan. They're potentially more complicated to design, but they might give us more autonomy in how ongoing service is structured for decades to come.

Finalizing monthly operating costs is part of why we're asking for time to collect and evaluate alternatives.

The Survey

Given that there are so many unknowns, it is probably not fair to ask you to "vote for sewer." You don't have enough information to make an informed vote.

We hope this update helps and there is more information on the website. In the next week, we will send a survey asking you to indicate your support for the task force and the Township to keep investigating a wastewater solution that will work for all of us on Miner Lake. **Watch your mailbox for the survey.**

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Common Questions:

My septic system is practically brand new. Why should I support this?

The team is actively pursuing alternatives that allow for those with life still left on their septic fields to connect to the community system when needed.

The number of systems around you that are old and failing grows every year. Those systems negatively impact the quality of the lake and the value of all properties.

How much will all of this cost me?

We do not have a completed estimate of all potential costs to homeowners.

Is the \$60,000 estimate accurate?

This reflects estimated construction costs (including significant contingency costs) for the three options that have been considered.

However, **it does not include** any of the millions of dollars in possible grants, low interest rate loans or other favorable funding sources.



The **actual cost** picture is not yet complete.

Will each homeowner have to bear the entire cost themselves immediately?

One of the team's core principles is to balance the flexibility of connecting to a new system and costs. To help offset some of the cost, we are investigating the requirements to obtain grants from various State and Federal agencies for rural infrastructure improvements. We will also look to obtain low-interest financing that can be repaid over several decades (compared to a new septic system which requires payment in full to the contractors).

Is supporting completing the research for alternatives a vote for installing a lake-wide sewer?

Absolutely not. Voting "yes" will just show you're interested in getting more information and want the complete picture and options.

We know this has been a long process (*we've put in the hours...*) but we want to get it right! Once we're able to complete the research on engineering alternatives and actual costs, there will be a formal vote on adopting that plan.

If that plan is adopted, you will be kept updated and there will be clear opportunities where you will be able to decide whether the next project stage can move forward.

Factors to consider when thinking about sewer for your home:

- **Age of your system:** Most systems are designed for only 20 years of good performance
- **Size of your lot:** Typical lake lots don't meet Health Department requirements for a replacement septic system
- **Whether you're seasonal or year round:** Pump and haul gets really expensive for families and residents who like to entertain
- **Whether you intend to sell:** A failing system can sink a deal or *dramatically* lower your home's value.
- **Whether you want to build, remodel, or add an outbuilding:** Permits have specific requirements related to your system's size, performance, and setback.

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