

HALO, Neighbors!

The Newsletter of Home And Landowners Organization, Inc.

November 2010

October Meeting Recap

Despite the season's first real snowfall, HALO held another great meeting. Thank you to everybody who attended!

Discussion included a debrief on the Candidate Forum, an update on Chugach Electric's new Abbott Loop Substation (O'Malley and Hane), and the current status of AFD Station 10. You can read more about Station 10 in this Newsletter.

Next HALO Meeting--Thursday, December 2nd

HALO's next scheduled meeting is Thursday, December 2nd. The draft agenda includes a continued discussion of the city's 2011 budget and it's impact on residents in SE Anchorage, the pending closure of Fire Station #10, safety hazards at the Huffman & Pintail intersection and the latest development on the Hillside District Plan (HDP).

HALO member John Weddleton found some serious errors in the "Pre-production" version of the HDP, which was completed by the original contractor, Agnew::Beck. When trying to integrate the Planning and Zoning Commission and Assembly changes, they missed the intent on just a few of the 100+ changes. The errors were serious but will be easy to correct. HALO is carefully monitoring this process. Board member Dianne Holmes is checking the maps in the Pre-production version. We will be discussing this situation at Thursday's meeting.

HALO holds Board meetings the first Thursday, monthly, at 7 pm at the Holy Spirit Center (O'Malley Rd at Hillside Dr). See more about HALO's mission below. Members and guess are invited to attend, contribute to the discussions and alert the Board to issues that affect SE Anchorage neighborhoods.

ASD Budget Meetings

The Anchorage School District has contracted with Agnew::Beck to hold a series of community input meetings on their annual budget. Hillside residents will remember that this is the same firm contracted to create the Hillside District Plan. Meetings on the ASD budget are scheduled for 6 to 9 pm Wed Dec 1 at Clark Middle School; 6 to 9 pm Thurs Dec 2 at Hanshew

Middle School; and Sat Dec 4 at Gruening Middle School from 1 to 4 pm.

Visit <http://www.asdk12.org/depts/budget/> if you would like to sign up for one of these sessions. You may also visit <http://www.asdk12.org/depts/budget/comments/> to submit comments on the budget, or email your ideas or suggestions to School Board Chair John Steiner at steiner_john@asdk12.org.

Proposed Muni Budget Affects Rabbit Creek Fire Station

With the influx of new homes on Upper Hillside in the early 1980's, Mayor George Sullivan recommended that the Rabbit Creek Fire Station be moved from its location off the Seward Highway near Potter Marsh to its present location near Bear Valley Elementary School. This move dramatically improved response times to these Upper Hillside neighborhoods.

Unfortunately, the proposed budget for 2011 recommends drastic alterations to this successful solution.

Rabbit Creek Fire Station is currently staffed with a three-person crew on Fire Engine 10 and a single firefighter on Tender 10. Engine 10 responds to both fire and medical emergencies. Tender 10 is a 2500-gallon water truck used to back up Fire Engines in areas without fire hydrants (most of Hillside). Water tenders are not equipped to serve as the primary resource for fire attack or to respond to medical emergencies.

Closing Engine 10 will essentially close the entire station, as stations require minimum staffing of two personnel.

If Engine 10 closes, response times will dramatically increase for the Rabbit Creek area. In the winter, expect at least doubled response times, as Hillside apparatus must operate with chains, limiting top speeds to 30 mph. Station 8 (O'Malley Road near Alaska Zoo) and Station 9 (Huffman & Old Seward) will provide response. Under ideal driving circumstances, both are a minimum of five minutes away from Station 10.

Medical responses remain the greatest majority of AFD calls, and time is of the essence, especially with stroke or heart attack, where time equals tissue loss. As most realize, one individual alone cannot perform effective CPR, assess cardiac rhythms, establish patient airways or IV access or package patients for transport. This means that effective treatment cannot truly begin until more personnel arrive on the scene.

All Hillside residents are aware of the danger of fire, whether it be in a home or in the forest. Successful firefighting demands quick response. With spruce bark beetle killed trees, frequency of high winds, steep topography and a limited road system, the best method of preventing massive property loss is to speed adequate resources to the fire. It will only take five minutes for a small kitchen fire to engulf an entire structure. This five minutes could be as simple as a response difference from the Huffman Station.

The Rabbit Creek Community Council recently passed a resolution asking that Engine 10 remain in full service at Station 10. Those in agreement with this resolution are urged to contact Assembly Members Chris Birch at 346-3265 and Jennifer Johnston at 346-1087.

This article submitted by Brian Partch, an AFD Firefighter and Steering Committee member of the Huffman/O'Malley Community Council, and is reprinted from the HOCC Newsletter. Do you have items of interest from your neighborhood? Submit them to halonewslettereditor@gmail.com

You and Your Septic System

Part II - Septic System Maintenance, Troubleshooting and Upgrading

by Ted Moore, P.E.

Flattop Technical Services

Note: This is the second in a series of articles. The first article describing conventional septic systems appeared in the October, 2010 HALO newsletter. Future articles will discuss: (3) Advanced treatment wastewater systems, (4) Neighborhood cluster wastewater systems, (5) Municipal and State regulations governing on-site wastewater disposal, and (6) Certificates of On-Site Approval (COSA).

Septic System Maintenance:

The biggest benefit of a conventional septic system is that it has rather minimal maintenance requirements. However; many homeowners don't seem to realize that their septic system is a biologic treatment unit with a finite life span, and does require a certain level of on-going care and maintenance. Unlike the situation with homes served by public sewer where the responsibility for wastewater treatment lies with a centralized management authority, the homeowner with an on-site system must take a much more active role in the operation of the wastewater disposal system.

First and foremost, be sensible about what you send down the drain. Water is a great mechanism for transporting unwanted material away from your house, but only pure water can percolate through soil. So, in order to do its job, your septic system must break down wastewater solids into gaseous components or physically separate them from the wastewater stream. Grease is a problem. It doesn't decompose in a septic system and is good at clogging up pipes, so do yourself a favor and don't pour it down the drain. Garbage disposals chop up food very nicely so that it can disappear down the drain, but why? The more solids you send down the drain the sooner your septic system will fail. Why not take an extra minute and put food scraps in the trash....or better yet, compost them.

Second, have your septic tank pumped regularly. The primary purpose of your septic tank is to settle out as much as possible of the solid material in your wastewater and turn it into scum and/or sludge. This allows a vacuum pumper truck to pump the collected solid material out and dump it into a Municipal sewer for disposal. Some anaerobic decomposition of solids does take place in the septic tank, but particularly in Alaska's cold climate such decomposition is very slow and limited. A good rule of thumb is to have your tank pumped every two years. This is frequently enough to remove most of the solids than can be separated in the tank before they build up to the point that they flow on into the absorption field where they cannot be removed. Of course, no matter how well a tank does its job of separating out solids, there is always some remaining material with neutral buoyancy in the effluent. These suspended solids flow on into the soil absorption system, and eventually cause it to clog up and need to be replaced.

Troubleshooting Septic System Problems:

One of the less pleasant experiences in rural home ownership is when one suddenly discovers raw sewage backing up into a bathtub or through a floor drain. Ask any Hillside resident and you will probably be told a horror story about a septic system that acted up at the most inopportune time. Sewage backups can be caused by a number of problems, some of them much easier to remedy than others.

When this happens, the first step is to figure out just where the problem is. This can be easily done by removing the caps on the standpipes that are located just outside the foundation, at the septic tank and in the soil absorption system – and comparing the relative fluid levels in each. For example, if the fluid level

is high in the septic tank, but not as high in the soil absorption system, this indicates that there is probably a simple plumbing problem in the pipe between the tank and the absorption system. This is frequently all there is to the problem, particularly in older septic systems where cast iron pipe was used. Over time the slow seepage of effluent causes a thick scale to build up in an iron pipe and eventually clog it completely. In some situations this type of blockage can be cleared with a snake – in others it may be necessary to arrange for a backhoe to dig up and replace the pipe with PVC.

Similarly, if the fluid level is high in the cleanout pipe next to your foundation, but not in the septic tank, the obstruction is somewhere between the two. If none of the exterior cleanout pipes have high fluid levels, then the obstruction must be somewhere inside the residence. In either case, call a plumber or a drain pipe cleaning company.

If, when you go outside to check the fluid levels in the standpipes, you discover a large, new depression in your yard where your septic tank used to be, you will immediately realize that that inexpensive steel septic tank has finally rusted out and collapsed. It will have to be replaced immediately, but a Municipal permit is required. Call a septic contractor and/or an engineer to draw up the permit application and do the work.

Finally, if the fluid levels in the soil absorption system standpipes, as well as in the septic tank standpipes, are all high you have a serious problem on your hands. The absorption field has failed, and is either clogged or inundated with groundwater; it will almost surely need to be upgraded in the near future. By reducing your water consumption you can probably get the system to limp along for a short while longer.

Upgrading a failing septic system:

The process of upgrading a septic system can be expensive, time consuming and very disruptive to your carefully manicured lawn. The first step is to arrange with an engineer to dig one or more test holes in order to assess the soil characteristics pertinent to the design of a replacement system. A typical test hole is dug with a backhoe down to a depth of 16 or 18 feet to allow visual classification of the soil strata and installation of a ***groundwater monitor tube***. Once the best soil stratum is identified, the engineer conducts a ***perc test*** to determine the rate that the soil can absorb water. Assuming the perc rate is acceptable and groundwater is not an insurmountable problem, the engineer then draws up a septic design, including a site plan illustrating the proposed location relative to constraints including wells, surface water, buildings and property lines, which is used to apply for a Municipal upgrade permit. After the permit is issued, the homeowner contracts with an excavator to install the system and arranges with the engineer to oversee the construction and submit required as-built documentation to the Municipality. In most cases the septic tank is replaced at the same time as the absorption field upgrade. The typical contractor cost for upgrading a conventional septic system is usually somewhere between \$7000 and \$15,000, depending on soil conditions and whether or not a new septic tank and/or lift station are also needed.

But, what if a site cannot be found on the lot with suitable soils for installing a conventional septic system upgrade? Unfortunately, this type of problem is arising with increasing frequency on the Hillside. This is because many of the sites with the best soils (i.e. sands and gravels) have already been developed, and remaining sites may have impermeable silts and clays and/or shallow groundwater or bedrock. Since wastewater regulations require that all disposal systems be located a minimum of 100 feet from wells or any kind of surface water, these can severely limit the potentially usable portion of a lot. The separation distance problem is aggravated by the fact that street construction frequently results in the creation of seasonal streams in roadside ditches.

Until recently, the only option for upgrading the wastewater disposal system on lots that could not support a conventional septic system was to install a large (2000 – 4000 gallon) **holding tank**. A holding tank collects and stores all the wastewater coming from a residence, and when it is full the contents must be pumped and trucked away and dumped into the Municipal sewer system. Although they do provide a functional solution, holding tanks are unpopular, both because of the on-going expense of pumping, and because they significantly decrease the value of a residence. Clearly other options are needed.

Part III in the next newsletter will discuss on-site **Advanced Treatment Wastewater systems**.

Ted Moore is a local civil engineer who specializes in septic system design, construction and testing. Comments or questions on this article may be e-mailed to tgmoore@gci.net

Hillside District Plan Implementation

HALO's Hillside District Plan (HDP) implementation committee met for a second time on November 19 to continue working on the Well Water Monitoring Program. Hydrologist Jim Munter and Statistician Pat Hanson attended. Both live on the Hillside.

Munter said typically a Well Water Protection Program would include four categories of activity: Monitoring, Ordinances, Education and Enforcement. This committee is focusing on the monitoring. There was agreement that it makes sense to start with monitoring. Perhaps more would be done in the future if monitoring results suggest a need.

Munter showed that the HDP map is very similar to the map in the 1997 Bristol Environmental study that used Hillside data from the late 80's to the late 90's. Neither shows much area with high nitrates. This suggests there is no impending crisis and likely very little change.

Hanson felt that starting with the Muni's Certificate of On Site Approvals (COSAs) and the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) data for public wells, the data collected would likely be statistically defensible as a representative sample. We could increase the data set by asking well water testing companies to encourage people to send their results. Results could be by group of COSAs in 5 year blocks or something similar.

This is an activity we would want to coordinate with the city and state but it is likely data gathering and reporting could be done by a non governmental group like HALO or the Anchorage Waterways Council. The cost for this level of monitoring could be as low as \$5,000 per year.

We will gather more information and meet again in December.

Submitted by John Weddleton, Hillside District Plan CAC member.

HALO Website

Visit the HALO, Inc. web site at <http://www.anchoragehalo.org/>. Learn more about your organization and issues of special interest for residents on the Hillside. If you have comments, or would like submit postings on the web site, please contact: Bjarne Holm at bjarnehholm9@hotmail.com

Know your Water Well

“Definitions”

Before getting deeper into our water wells, I think it is important that we understand the terminology that is commonly used in the description of well features and groundwater science. Therefore, this month I will present simplified definitions and some layman discussion of the most common terms:

Groundwater - water found below the ground surface (ie, underground water)

Aquifer - a geologic formation, or series of formations, which contains groundwater. Basically, there are two types: (1) Confined Aquifer, also known as "artesian", which has a confining layer (ie, an impermeable formation through which water does not transmit) directly overlying it. As a result the water is under pressure (called geopressure) and will rise above the elevation of the upper confining layer. The pressure, also called "head", at any given point in a confined aquifer is a function of the elevation of the water source minus the friction loss as the water travels through the aquifer to the given point of reference. If the pressure, or head measured in feet, is greater than the depth of the well, the water will flow over the top but a well does not have to flow to be an artesian. A large majority of the hillside wells tap confined/ artesian aquifers. (2) Unconfined, also known as a water table aquifer, has no confining layer above it and, consequently, is exposed to atmospheric pressure. When tapped by a well the water level does not rise above the upper limit of formation saturation. There are very few water table/unconfined aquifer wells on the hillside because most water tables encountered are very shallow. Please note ---there is no one common water table covering the hillside and it is a serious error to depict the varying water levels found in wells as a water table.

Groundwater Gradient - the velocity of groundwater movement through an aquifer--usually described in feet per day in a stated direction; on the hillside, the overall gradient is generally downhill towards the inlet.

Pumping rate - pump output measured in gallons per minute (GPM)

Pumping Water Level (PWL) - the water level in a well when it is pumping (obviously this will vary with the pumping rate).

Static Water Level (SWL) - the water level in a well when it has not been pumped for a while; will vary with atmospheric pressure daily and with aquifer recharge seasonally.

Aquifer Recharge - precipitation "up the hill" which percolates down into the aquifer.

Drawdown (DD) - SWL minus PWL at a given/stated pumping rate; measured in feet

Specific Capacity - the pumping rate needed to lower the pumping level one foot; stated as GPM per foot of DD; important statistic used to describe a well's strength and in sizing a pump for the well.

Total Dynamic Head (TDH) - the amount of pump pressure (head) output required to deliver water at a given pressure at a given point (usually the highest fixture elevation in the house) or simply 60 PSI at the pressure tank.

Yield - the greatest amount of water that a well will produce on a sustained basis; measured in GPM.

Bedrock - consolidated geologic formation(s); the bedrock encountered in hillside wells is generally an impermeable siltstone/claystone which has been altered and fractured by the Chugach mountain building events; the groundwater in the bedrock travels through fractures (fracture zone seepage); bedrock wells usually have low yields and water levels that rise a few feet above the elevation at which the bedrock is encountered.

This is the second article that Wayne Westburg has submitted on water wells. In the next issue, Wayne will begin answering common questions about wells. If you have a question for him, email w44west@gci.net or halonewslettereditor@gmail.com

New Huffman Roundabout?

Do you regularly use Huffman Road? What do you think about putting a roundabout or a signaled intersection at the corner of Huffman and Pintail?

Several years ago, the Huffman/O'Malley Community Council identified a traffic problem facing drivers at this intersection. The problem is caused by Grace Christian School's traffic, where most students are transported in individual private autos. After researching the issue with representatives of Grace, HOCC determined that the solution would be to add a "flashing school zone" area to this intersection. Grace offered to provide crossing guards, and the solution would enable local students currently being driven to school to walk to school instead, as they would be able to safely cross Huffman.

This solution would have only slowed traffic before and after school. By simply slowing traffic, most accidents could be prevented. Unlike a traffic light, which would stop traffic 24 hours a day, a school crossing zone would only be in effect during these transition hours.

Then the Muni and the State became involved in the situation. HOCC representatives were informed that officials would not allow a school crossing zone for a private school, despite the fact that students attending public schools (Huffman Elementary) would also be able to use this crossing. Instead, the solution proffered by ADT&PF would be to enlarge this area to a five-lane road built to urban standards. This would create dedicated turn lanes and a center "fast" lane to speedily move traffic up and downhill.

HOCC plead against creating "fast" center lanes. We stated that this would indeed speed traffic, but it would also increase accidents. We asked Representative Mike Hawker to step in, and we held another meeting with Grace representatives. Unfortunately, what came out of that meeting was the school's full support of the State's plan. Grace representatives had decided that they preferred having dedicated turn lanes and moving through traffic on the "fast" center lanes. As none of their students walked to school, a pedestrian crossing was unnecessary. HOCC representatives made it clear to Grace representatives that creating a "fast" lane would exasperate the already dangerous road conditions. Grace representatives response was that they preferred moving traffic.

The road "improvements" were made. APD statistics show that traffic accidents at this intersection have increased, several with serious injuries. There have been three major accidents since school began this fall. The majority of these accidents involve traffic turning left onto Huffman from the school.

Grace parents are now looking at potential solutions to this dangerous situation. Among their suggestions are making Huffman/Pintail a signaled intersection. This will stop all traffic from both directions 24 hours a day, allowing safe egress to and from the school. The other solution they suggest is to build a roundabout at this intersection. As it is now five lanes, this would be another "double-lane" roundabout similar to Dowling Road. It will also require using more of the right-of-way.

What do you think? Do you want a signaled intersection? Would you prefer a roundabout? Or is the creation of a school crossing zone the only appropriate solution?

Please weigh in with your opinion, especially if you use Huffman. Contact HALO President at w44west@gmail.com or your halonewslettereditor@gmail.com and let us know!

Submitted by Katie Nolan, Secretary, Huffman/O'Malley Community Council

HALO Neighbors Newsletter

Thank you for the wonderful feedback on this new format for staying in touch! We appreciate your comments. We especially appreciate your patience as we work out the format.

If you have an idea for an article, or a question you would like to have discussed with your friends and neighbors, let us know. We also encourage to forward this newsletter to your neighbors and help them become involved in their community. Or better yet, print a copy and hand it to someone!

Thank you for the new logo and name for this communication! Isn't Hillside wonderful? We asked for your creative suggestions and Hillside immediately came through.

Welcome New Members!

HALO is a place where all Hillside can come together and guide our future. While we are made up of representatives from most of the area Community Councils, we are in a unique place that separates us from the Municipal government. Besides our successful Candidate events, we address the broad issues that affect each and every resident.

Guests are always welcome to attend our monthly Board meetings, and we encourage you to participate whether or not you and your neighborhood are facing a particular issue. Our elected officials often join us or we teleconference during the session when we have particular concerns.

We especially thank our newest members for joining this unique organization. Especially in today's climate it is valuable for us to be informed and work together.

Join Your Friends and Neighbors at HALO

Are you a HALO member? Dues are only \$10 a year. HALO meets on first Thursday of each month, at 7 pm, at the Holy Spirit Retreat, on the southwest corner of Hillside and O'Malley. Our elected representatives often join us and it is the perfect place to learn about what is going on with and in your community. All meetings are open to the public, and every effort is made to announce any change in date, time or location.

HALO is a non-profit, grass roots organization formed in 1969 (before the merger of the City of Anchorage and the Greater Anchorage Borough) for the purpose of advocating for rural neighborhoods in Southeast Anchorage. Residents outside of the HALO area also join to support our goals and share in our activities.

HALO's boundaries encompass part or all of eight Community Councils: Abbott Loop, Basher, Bear Valley, Glen Alps, Hillside-East, Huffman/O'Malley, Mid-Hillside and Rabbit Creek. While we work closely with these councils, HALO maintains a separate identity from the Municipal government. We urge

memberships in both your local Community Council and HALO.

Name

Phone (home)

Phone (alternate, optional)

Mailing Address

Property Address, Subdivision & Approximate Acreage:

E-Mail Address

New Member

Renewal

I would be interested in serving as a board member

I would be willing to work with a committee

Dues Enclosed _____ \$10 per year

Donation to Legal Fund _____ (optional)

Print and send to: HALO, P.O. Box 110096, Anchorage, AK 99511

(Email addresses are invaluable for timely notification. All information remains confidential!)