

**Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035**

MEMORANDUM

From: John LaGorga, Town Councilman

To: Town of Nelson Town Board

Date: April 2026

Subject: Summary of Sewer Study Communication Plan, Findings, and Project Origin

Purpose of This Memorandum

This memorandum documents the origin of the Town of Nelson Sewer Study and summarizes the scope, implementation, and findings of the public communication plan undertaken as part of that study. The intent is to provide the Town Board with a clear record of why the study was initiated, how information was communicated to residents and businesses, and how public feedback directly shaped the current scope of the proposed sewer district.

Origin of the Sewer Study

The sewer study originated from requests by several businesses located in the Four Corners area and along Route 20 south, which indicated that public sewer service would support business growth. These requests were consistent with input received during the Town's Comprehensive Plan process, where participants identified a need for water and sewer infrastructure to support environmental health and economic vitality.

In response, the Town pursued and received a New York State grant to study potential sewer service areas, system layout, and costs. Two primary areas were evaluated: Route 20 south (including Nelson Heights Road and Midstate Lane) and the Greater Four Corners area (including Thomas and Putnam Roads). Based on resident feedback and survey results, residential areas showing limited interest were removed from consideration, and the study was refocused on the Greater Four Corners area.

Communication Plan Scope and Findings

The communication plan consisted of a series of mailed letters, posted materials on the Town's website, public input survey, and a public information meeting. Each step was intended to progressively inform the public, gather feedback, and refine the study area based on demonstrated interest.

Letter #1 – October 2025

The first communication introduced the sewer study and summarized the initial findings. It informed property owners that study results were available on the Town's website and scheduled an initial public information meeting. The letter emphasized that the project was exploratory and that public input would play a key role in determining next steps.

Letter #2 – December 2025

After information on costs became available, significant concern was expressed by residents, particularly those on residential streets. In response, the Town postponed the scheduled public information meeting and issued a second letter.

This communication:

- Explained why additional time was needed to gather input,
- Included a white paper comparing private septic systems and public sewer systems,
- Provided preliminary cost information by service area, and
- Requested direct feedback through a formal public opinion survey asking whether residents wanted public sewer service and were willing to pay the associated costs.

Residents were strongly encouraged to respond so that the Town could make decisions based on documented interest rather than assumptions.

Public Feedback and Survey Results

The Town received and compiled survey responses across the original study areas. The results were as follows:

Greater Four Corners Area

- Yes: 9
- No: 15
- No Response: 33

Nelson Road – North of Town Hall

- Yes: 0
- No: 11

- No Response: 11

Thomas Road and Putnam Road

- Yes: 1
- No: 24
- No Response: 14

Nelson Heights Road, Midstate Lane, and Route 20 South

- Yes: 4
- No: 33
- No Response: 16

The results demonstrated that a clear majority of property owners on Midstate Lane, Nelson Heights Road, Thomas Road, Putnam Road, and Nelson Road north of the Town Hall were not in favor of public sewer service.

Findings and Refinement of Study Scope

Based on this feedback, the Town concluded that there was insufficient interest to justify further consideration of sewer service in the predominantly residential areas. Accordingly:

- The study area was reduced to focus solely on the Greater Four Corners area, where there was at least partial interest in public sewer service.
- Engineers revised the sewer system layout and developed updated cost estimates reflecting the Greater Four Corners area only.
- The Greater Four Corners area now represents the full scope of the sewer study and any potential future sewer system in the Town of Nelson.

Letters #3A and #3B - February 2026

Two separate letters were issued to clearly communicate the outcome of the survey:

- Letter #3A was sent to property owners on the residential roads, informing them that their properties were removed from the proposed sewer district and would not be subject to future costs or further study.
- Letter #3B was sent to Greater Four Corners property owners, informing them that their properties remained within the proposed sewer district, and that revised layouts and cost estimates were being developed.

Letter #4 and Public Information Meeting

A final letter was sent to Greater Four Corners property owners scheduling a public information meeting and providing the final conceptual layout and cost information for the reduced study area.

Public Information Meeting

A public information meeting was held on April 15, 2026. The meeting agenda included:

1. Opening remarks and origin of the sewer study
2. Explanation of how a sewer district is formed under New York State law
3. Overview of the proposed hamlet sewer system
4. Project cost estimates
5. Financing and payment structure
6. Next steps
7. Closing remarks by Town Supervisor James Cunningham

A question-and-answer session was conducted, and residents were reminded that no project can proceed unless initiated and supported by property owners through the formal petition process.

Conclusion

The communication plan successfully informed residents, gathered meaningful public input, and ensured that the study scope reflects the clearly expressed preferences of the community. Residential areas with strong opposition were removed from further consideration, while limited interest in the Greater Four Corners area justified continued evaluation only for that location. No further action will occur unless property owners choose to initiate it.

LETTER #1

October 17, 2025

Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035

Subject: Public Information Meeting – Sewer Study Findings

Dear Resident,

The Town of Nelson invites you to a Public Information Meeting to present the findings of the Sewer Feasibility Study. The meeting will be held at the Town Hall on October 2, 2025 at 6:30 pm.

The study evaluated the feasibility, benefits, and costs of establishing a municipal sewer district in two areas: the Nelson Four Corners and the south side of NYS Route 20. The findings are now available and will be presented at the meeting.

A summary of the study is also available on the Town's website. Residents are encouraged to review the information and share feedback.

This meeting is an important opportunity to ask questions, provide input, and help shape the next steps. Community feedback will play a key role in determining whether and how the project moves forward.

We look forward to your participation. We value your participation and look forward to working together to improve our community.

Thank you for your attention and involvement.

Sincerely,

John J. LaGorga

John J. LaGorga

LETTER #2

December 11, 2025

Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035

Subject: Public Sewer Project – Meeting Rescheduled & Public Opinion Survey

Dear Resident,

Please note that the Public Information Meeting has been rescheduled to February 25, 2026, at 6:00 PM at Town Hall.

The Town of Nelson has postponed the meeting so that we can gather opinions about the public sewer project. To help inform you, we have attached an educational paper comparing private septic systems and public sewer systems. We have also included cost information for the public sewer systems for the different areas in our town.

Septic System and Public Sewer System Information

See the attached paper by Septic Safe Solutions.

Public Sewer System Cost Information

Area	Annual Cost per Equivalent Dwelling Unit
Nelson Hamlet (only)	\$1,865 ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾
Nelson Hamlet plus Putnam and Thomas Roads	\$2,180 ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾
Route 20 (only)	\$2,085 ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾
Route 20 plus Mid-State and Nelson Heights Roads	\$1,550 ⁽¹⁾ ⁽²⁾

(1) Includes annual treatment cost at the Cazenovia wastewater treatment plant and debt service for sewer and lateral installation.

(2) Assumes 60% grant funding for the sewer and lateral installation.

Public Opinion Survey

Your input is critical. Please answer the following three questions with a yes or no response:

1. Do you want or need a public sewer system?
2. Would you pay up to **\$2,180 per year** for a public sewer system?
3. If more than 90% grant funding is awarded, would you pay **\$670 per year** for a public sewer system?

Instructions:

- Include your mailing address with your response.
- Responses can be called in at **315-655-8582**, or emailed to john.lagorga@yahoo.com, or mailed to Town Hall.
- We are seeking **100% participation**. If we do not hear from you, we plan to follow up in person.

Your feedback will play a key role in determining whether and how this project moves forward. Thank you for your attention and involvement.

Public Information Meeting Details:

- **Date:** February 25, 2026
- **Time:** 6:00 PM
- **Location:** Town Hall

We look forward to working together to improve our community.

Sincerely,

John J. LaGorga

John J. LaGorga

Septic vs. Sewer: A Comprehensive Guide to Your Options

Published by [Kevin](https://septicsafesolutions.com/septic-vs-sewer-a-comprehensive-guide-to-your-options) on January 18, 2025 (<https://septicsafesolutions.com/septic-vs-sewer-a-comprehensive-guide-to-your-options>)

Introduction

When it comes to managing wastewater, homeowners often face a critical decision: should they opt for a septic system or connect to a municipal sewer line? This choice is not merely a matter of preference; it can significantly impact your property, finances, and the environment. Each option has its own set of advantages and disadvantages that can influence your decision based on various factors such as location, budget, and personal values.

Septic systems, often found in rural or suburban areas, are self-contained wastewater treatment systems that treat and dispose of sewage on-site. They can offer a sense of independence from municipal services, but they also come with responsibilities that can be daunting for some homeowners. On the other hand, sewer systems are typically managed by local governments or private companies, providing a more hands-off approach to wastewater management. However, they can also come with higher costs and less control over the system.

In this comprehensive guide, we will delve into the pros and cons of both septic and sewer systems. We will explore factors such as installation costs, maintenance requirements, environmental impact, and potential health risks. By the end of this article, you will have a clearer understanding of which option may be the best fit for your situation.

The following table summarizes the key points that will be discussed in detail throughout the article:

Aspect	Septic System	Sewer System
Installation Cost	Higher initial cost; varies by location	Lower initial cost; often included in property taxes
Maintenance	Regular pumping and inspections required	Minimal maintenance; managed by the municipality
Environmental Impact	Can contaminate groundwater if not maintained	Less risk of contamination; treated at a central facility

Control	Full control over the system	Limited control; dependent on municipal services
Longevity	Can last 20-30 years with proper care	Indefinite, as long as the municipal system is maintained

Understanding these factors will empower you to make an informed decision regarding your wastewater management needs. Let’s dive deeper into the specifics of each system to help you weigh your options effectively.

Septic Systems vs. Sewer Systems: A Deep Dive

Choosing between a septic system and a sewer connection is a significant decision that can affect your home and lifestyle. Each option has its own characteristics, and understanding these can help you make an informed choice. Let’s break down the pros and cons of each system, examining critical factors like cost, maintenance, environmental impact, and more.

Septic Systems: The Independent Option

Septic systems are designed for homes that are not connected to a municipal sewer line. They treat wastewater on-site, allowing homeowners to manage their own sewage disposal. Here are the key points to consider:

Pros:

- Independence: Homeowners have complete control over their wastewater management. This can be appealing for those who value self-sufficiency.
- Lower Monthly Costs: Once installed, septic systems typically incur lower ongoing costs compared to sewer systems, which often require monthly fees.
- Less Environmental Strain: In rural areas, septic systems can reduce the strain on municipal sewage treatment facilities.

Cons:

- High Initial Costs: Installing a septic system can be expensive, often ranging from \$3,000 to \$10,000, depending on the system type and local regulations.
- Maintenance Requirements: Regular maintenance is crucial. Homeowners must pump the tank every 3-5 years and inspect the system to prevent failures.
- Potential for Contamination: If not properly maintained, septic systems can leak and contaminate groundwater, posing health risks.

Sewer Systems: The Convenience Factor

Sewer systems are managed by local governments or private companies, transporting wastewater to a central treatment facility. This option is prevalent in urban and suburban areas. Here's what you need to know:

Pros:

- Minimal Maintenance: Homeowners are not responsible for the upkeep of the sewer line, as this is managed by the municipality.
- Less Risk of Failure: Sewer systems are generally more reliable, with less risk of backup or overflow, provided the municipal system is functioning correctly.
- Environmental Safety: Wastewater is treated at a central facility, reducing the risk of local contamination.
- Can increase property value.

Cons:

- Ongoing Costs: Sewer systems often come with monthly fees that can add up over time, depending on local rates.
- Less Control: Homeowners have little say in how the system operates or any changes that may be implemented by the municipality.
- Potential for Overflows: In heavy rain or snowmelt, sewer systems can become overwhelmed, leading to potential backups into homes or local waterways. This generally happens in older sewer systems.

Cost Comparison: A Financial Perspective

When weighing your options, consider the financial implications of each system. Here's a breakdown:

Cost Aspect	Septic System	Sewer System
Installation	\$3,000 – \$10,000	Varies; often included in property taxes
Monthly Fees	None (except maintenance costs)	Typically \$30 – \$100
Maintenance Costs	\$200 – \$500 every few years	Minimal; included in fees

Environmental Considerations

Both systems have environmental implications that can influence your decision:

- **Septic Systems:** If not properly maintained, they can lead to groundwater contamination. Homeowners must be vigilant about what goes down the drain to avoid issues.
- **Sewer Systems:** Generally safer for the environment, as wastewater is treated at a central facility. However, they can contribute to pollution during heavy rains when systems overflow.

Health and Safety Concerns

While both systems can be safe when properly managed, certain risks are associated with each:

- **Septic Systems:** The primary concern is the potential for leaks and groundwater contamination. Regular inspections and maintenance are essential to mitigate these risks.
- **Sewer Systems:** The main risk comes from system overflows, which can lead to untreated sewage entering local waterways, posing health risks to the community.

Conclusions

Deciding between a septic system and a sewer connection requires careful consideration of various factors, including costs, maintenance, environmental impact, and personal preferences. Each option has its strengths and weaknesses, and understanding these can help you make the right choice for your home and lifestyle.

LETTER #3A

February 13, 2026

Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035

Subject: Public Sewer Project – Public Opinion Survey Results and New Proposed Sewer District Boundaries

Dear Resident,

Notice:

- 1) If you are receiving this letter, **your property is no longer included in a proposed sewer district.**
- 2) Please note that the **Public Information Meeting** scheduled for February 25, 2026 has been **anceled.**

Thank you for participating in the public opinion survey. A majority of property owners in the areas listed below indicated they do not wish to have public sewers and sewer treatment. As a result, the study will move forward **without** further consideration of these areas.

The final report will include:

- A summary of the originally proposed sewer districts and layout and associated costs
- Survey results and acknowledgment that the majority of property owners declined interest in sewer service, making a petition for such a system unlikely
- A sewer system layout and estimated costs for the Four Corners area, where there is a concentrated interest in public sewer service

Areas where the majority of respondents declined public sewer service:

- The entire proposed sewer district Route 20 (south), Mid-State and Nelson Heights Road
- Thomas and Putnam Road
- Properties on Nelson Road north of the Town Hall

Based on the public survey responses, your property will no longer be considered for public sewer services as part of this study, and you will not be responsible for any associated system costs. There are no future sewer studies planned for these areas.

Thank you again for your participation in this process. This letter will be the final communication you receive regarding the current sewer system study. If you wish to continue following the study's progress, you are welcome to attend our monthly Town Board meetings or review updates posted on the Town's website.

Sincerely,

John J. LaGorga

John J. LaGorga

LETTER #3B

February 13, 2026

Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035

Subject: Public Sewer Project – Public Opinion Survey Results and New Proposed Sewer District Boundaries

Dear Resident,

Notice:

1. Your property **remains within** the proposed sewer district.
2. The Public Information Meeting scheduled for **February 25, 2026** has been **canceled** and will be **rescheduled**.

Thank you for participating in the public opinion survey. The results show mixed levels of support for a public sewer system in the Four Corners area. A map of the **newly proposed sewer district boundaries** is enclosed for your review.

Because the proposed district boundaries have changed, a revised sewer system layout and updated cost estimates are being developed for the Four Corners area. These updated materials will be provided to you in **March 2026**, at which time a new Public Information Meeting will be scheduled.

Thank you again for your engagement in this process. We look forward to continuing our work together to support and improve our community.

Sincerely,

John J. LaGorga

John J. LaGorga

LETTER #4

March 26, 2025

Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035

Subject: Public Sewer Project – Public Information Meeting & Summary of Findings

Dear Resident,

Please note that the Public Information Meeting is now scheduled for April 15, 2026, at 6:30 PM at Town Hall.

After receiving public feedback, the study evaluated the feasibility, benefits, and costs of establishing a municipal sewer district in the **Nelson Four Corners** area. The findings are now complete and will be presented at the upcoming public information meeting. They are also available on the Town's website.

For a typical single-family residence, the estimated annual cost of the proposed public sewer system is **\$2,212**, assuming **60% grant funding**. The attached figure illustrates the proposed layout. In general, the system would include new service laterals from homes and businesses to a new gravity sewer installed in the road. The street sewer would convey wastewater to a pump station, which would then pump the flow over the hill to the Cazenovia Water Pollution Control Facility for treatment.

A municipal sewer district in New York State can be formed in two ways: (1) **by petition of property owners**, or (2) **by town board initiation**. The Town Board prefers the petition method, allowing property owners to organize and begin the formal district-formation process themselves.

Residents are encouraged to attend the public information meeting to learn more about the study results, understand the procedures for forming a sewer district, and provide feedback. The meeting agenda includes:

1. How residents and businesses can form a municipal sewer district
2. Summary of the public sewer project findings
3. Next steps in the process

We appreciate your interest and participation, and we look forward to working together to support the community's future infrastructure needs.

Sincerely,

John J. LaGorga
John J. LaGorga

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING SUMMARY

**Town of Nelson
4085 Nelson Road
Cazenovia, NY 13035**

PUBLIC INFORMATION MEETING SUMMARY

From: John LaGorga, Town Councilman

To: Town of Nelson Town Board

Date: April, 15 2026

Subject: Summary of Sewer Study Public Information Meeting held on April 15, 2026 at 6:30 PM, Town Hall

1. Opening Remarks - Origin of the Sewer Study

The sewer study originated from requests by several businesses in the Four Corners area and along Route 20 south, which said that public sewers would support business growth. These requests were consistent with input received during the Town's Comprehensive Plan process, where multiple participants identified a need for expanded water and sewer infrastructure to support a healthy environment and economic vitality.

In response, the Town pursued and received a state grant to study and evaluate potential sewer service areas, system layout, and costs. The study examined two areas: (1) Route 20 south, including the residential areas of Nelson Heights Road and Mid-State Lane, and (2) the Greater Four Corners area, including Thomas and Putnam Roads. Feedback from residents, including a formal public opinion survey, showed limited interest in sewer service on the residential roads, which were subsequently removed from consideration. The effort was then refocused on the Greater Four Corners area, leading to this current discussion of district formation, system layout, and costs for that area.

2. Forming a Sewer District

Executive Summary

The Town explained that a sewer system serving only a portion of the community must be formed as a special assessment district, meaning only properties that benefit would pay for the system. Formation would occur only if affected property owners initiate and support the district, primarily through a legally sufficient petition. Multiple safeguards exist to ensure residents retain control over whether the district and project proceed.

Questions & Answers

- **What is a special assessment district and why is it needed?**
A special assessment district allows only the benefiting properties, identified as 67 parcels in the Hamlet/Four Corners area, to pay for the sewer project rather than the entire town.
- **How can a sewer district be formed?**
Three methods exist under New York State Town Law, but the Town will only pursue the option where residents initiate the process by petition. The petition must represent over 51% of the assessed property value within the proposed district.
- **Why is the threshold based on assessed value instead of number of owners?**
State law requires the 51% threshold to be based on assessed value, which can allow one high-value property to carry disproportionate weight. Town officials acknowledged the concern but noted they must follow state statute. Town officials would scrutinize a petition that was weighted heavily by only a few properties.
- **What happens once a valid petition is submitted?**
The Town Board may proceed to form the district, but even then, the project will only advance if total costs, financing terms, and per-property cost caps meet the specified limits set in the petition during district formation.
- **Can residents stop the project after the district is formed?**
Yes. If cost limits or financing conditions established in the district documents cannot be met, the project cannot proceed, even if the district exists.

3. The Hamlet Sewer System

Executive Summary

The proposed sewer system would serve 67 properties using a gravity collection system and a pump station to convey wastewater to the Town of Cazenovia wastewater treatment plant. The design aims to minimize disruption, provide long-term reliability, and offer future connection potential even for properties that may not immediately connect. Alternative treatment approaches were evaluated but deemed not cost-effective.

Questions & Answers

- **What infrastructure is proposed?**
The plan includes gravity sewers along Route 20 and side roads, a pump station at a low point, and a force main connecting to the Town of Cazenovia's wastewater treatment plant.

- **Why was connection to Cazenovia chosen?**
Connection to the existing municipal treatment plant was determined to be significantly more cost-effective than building a new local treatment facility.
- **Will every property receive a sewer connection?**
Yes. One lateral connection per property is included, and connections are installed to allow immediate or future hook-up at no separate construction cost beyond the overall project financing.
- **What if a property cannot connect by gravity?**
Grinder pumps may be required for properties with low-lying plumbing; design alternatives such as directional drilling would be used to minimize tree removal or surface disruption.
- **Who maintains the system?**
The sewer district would fund operation and maintenance, administered by the Town, potentially through a service agreement with the Town of Cazenovia.

4. Project Costs

Executive Summary

The total estimated project cost is approximately \$5.45 million, including construction, contingencies, engineering, legal, and financing costs. The estimate intentionally includes a high contingency due to early project development. Without substantial grant funding, annual costs per property would be high.

Questions & Answers

- **What is the estimated total project cost?**
Construction is estimated at \$3.5 million, with additional contingencies and soft costs bringing the total to roughly \$5.45 million.
- **Why is the contingency so high?**
A 30% contingency reflects uncertainty at this conceptual stage; it would decrease as design advances and risks are better defined.
- **What happens if bids exceed estimates?**
If bids exceed limits established during district formation, the project cannot proceed unless revised and reapproved; otherwise, it halts.
- **Is there risk of spending money without building the project?**
There is some risk that engineering or planning costs could be incurred if the project

is halted later, although the Town emphasized efforts to minimize such risk through contingencies and adjusting the design to meet the agreed-upon budget.

5. Paying for It

Executive Summary

Funding would rely heavily on grants, with current programs typically covering up to 60% of project costs. The remaining balance would be financed through long-term bonding, with costs allocated to properties based on standardized “assessment units.” Even with grants, annual costs to property owners remain significant.

Questions & Answers

- **How much grant funding is realistically available?**
The Town expects a maximum of approximately 60% grant funding; obtaining higher percentages is extremely difficult unless economic hardship criteria are met.
- **How are costs divided among properties?**
Costs are allocated based on “units,” with one unit typically equal to a single-family residence, and additional units assigned to multi-family or commercial properties based on estimated wastewater flow.
- **What is the estimated annual cost per unit?**
The district cost is approximately \$1,600 per unit per year, plus an additional Town of Cazenovia treatment fee of about \$450 per connected property.
- **What if a property does not connect to the sewer?**
Non-connecting properties still pay the district’s debt and maintenance costs but do not pay the Town treatment user fee until they connect.

6. Next Steps

Executive Summary

No action will occur unless residents initiate it. The Town emphasized that the next step, if any, is an informal petition demonstrating strong interest before advancing toward formal petition. The formal petition is a legal document, and the Town would create this document on behalf of the residents, but only if a strong interest was demonstrated during the informal petition phase. Without such an informal or formal petition, the project ends with no cost or obligation to residents.

Questions & Answers

- **What must residents do to move forward?**

Interested property owners must organize and submit an informal petition indicating sufficient interest, ideally well above the legal minimum.

- **Is there a deadline to act?**

No formal deadline exists, though project data and cost estimates would become outdated over time.

- **Can the district boundaries change?**

Yes. Properties at the edges may be removed if there is clear opposition, as long as the district remains contiguous.

- **Will additional public input occur?**

Yes. Public hearings would be required at several stages, including district formation and any advancement toward construction.

6. Closing Remarks by James Cunningham (Town Supervisor and Madison County Chair of the Board of Supervisors)

Local governments are facing rapidly rising costs driven by inflation and by federal and state funding cuts that are passed down as mandated local expenses. When higher levels of government reduce funding, for programs such as Medicaid or social services, counties and towns are still legally required to provide those services, resulting in significant local cost increases that ultimately place upward pressure on property taxes.

Under this framework, local governments face a fundamental choice: either raise taxes on a fixed tax base or pursue economic growth that expands the tax base, allowing costs to be spread across more properties and activity. It was noted that while growth is not mandatory and communities may choose to remain small, without some level of economic growth, including infrastructure that supports business investment, tax increases become increasingly difficult to avoid as costs continue to rise.

We have held taxes to near zero throughout the seven years of this Board's service. Ultimately, we represent you. If the community's priority is to remain a small town with limited development, we will respect that direction and continue working to keep taxes as stable as possible. If, instead, the community supports thoughtful and well-planned economic growth, we are equally prepared to engage in that effort.