

Grinder Pump Concerns Draw Crowd of Residents to Selectmen's Meeting

The approximately 500 residents in Chelmsford with grinder pumps feel they are being mistreated compared to sewer users, and they let the Selectmen know their feelings on Monday.

For years, grinder pumps have been an issue for hundreds of residents in Chelmsford, and on Monday night, many of those residents packed the Selectmen's meeting to make their voices heard.

In advance of a warrant article on the topic coming to the floor of Town Meeting this fall, the Selectmen discussed a potential policy addressing the issue of fairness for the approximately 500 grinder pump residences in Chelmsford.

These residents, who've banded together as part of a group known as [the Sewer Fairness Alliance of Chelmsford](#), see themselves as second class citizens compared to the majority of homeowners in town who have access to town sewerage.

The devices serve as underground depositories for home waste coming from appliances such as toilets and sinks, using a small engine to grind the waste into a slurry once a critical mass is achieved.

However, those on hand at the meeting on Monday night told the board that these devices often fail, particularly during storms when there is no electricity to power the devices' engines.

Dick Gorham of Fenwick Drive told the board he had a septic system for 27 years until he was told his home could be part of the town's sewer system in the 90s, just before his home was designated for grinder pumps 14 years ago.

“With septic systems, I worried about things backing up during the holidays, but I live with that worry every day now,” he said. “(The Selectmen) are talking about fairness, but we have been treated unfairly since that day.”

The majority of grinder pumps in Chelmsford are the E-One model, which is maintained almost exclusively in Massachusetts by the FR Mahoney company.

Residents at the meeting complained that Mahoney would not service problems at night or on weekends and would often charge large fees, such as in one instance where Gorham said he had to pay \$2,300 to get his pump fixed.

Chairman Matt Hanson suggested the possibility that grinder pump owners be helped by the town in terms of aiding residents with payments rather than having the Department of Public Works service broken units, although it was unclear during the meeting if that policy would limit the town’s liability or create an expectation similar to utilities that would add additional burden on taxpayers elsewhere in town.

Town Manager Paul Cohen the board that his staff has heard frequent reports of pump units failing while still under warranty from FR Mahoney, although Sewer Commissioner Michael Vosnakis estimated it would cost approximately \$250,000 to survey every home with a grinder pump to see if it was in danger of failing.

Jan Andrews of St. Andrew’s Way told the board that her condominium association has paid \$60,000 replacing the pumps, although she was just as concerned with other issues surrounding the topic.

“On top of health issues because a lot of you know what is piling up, why are you allowing condominium developers to continue putting in these pumps when you know it doesn’t work right?,” she said to the Selectmen.

Cohen responded to her and other residents that in some areas sewerage would not be an option due to either topography or cost.

“Nobody wants to put in grinder pumps,” he said.

The board took up the item for the first time on Monday, so no decision was made on a policy for the issue, although the board agreed to vote during their next meeting whether to address it or not, and if they do, begin the process toward the hundreds of permutations a potential grinder pump policy could take.

One such option came from a [petition](#) presented by members of the Sewer Fairness Alliance officially during the meeting.

The board is next scheduled to meet on September 23.

<http://patch.com/massachusetts/chelmsford/grinder-pump-concerns-draw-crowd-of-residents-to-selectmens-meeting>