

Teamwork Leads To Possible Funding In Chaffee

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Chaffee is a small, mostly residential community in Southern Erie County, with roughly 400 residents. Water is provided to the community through a privately owned groundwater system, the Chaffee Water Works Co. Inc., incorporated in 1896.

I was asked by the NYSDOH to contact the Erie County Dept. of Health, and Mr. and Mrs. Franz, the systems current owners, to see if there was any assistance NYRWA could provide. Jay Patronik and Delores Funke from the Erie County DOH provided a brief history of the system, its current status, and what improvements they felt were necessary to keep the system in operation.

On April 20, 2005, I made an initial visit with Rodney Franz, and we toured the system. It was immediately obvious that this system was in serious need of repair and improvements. The entire distribution system is inadequately sized, supplied through an undersized storage tank, that is filled from a GWUDI well source. Apparently Rodney and his wife were the only local residents willing to assume control of the water system when the previous operator retired and moved away. When they purchased the system, rules and regulations were less stringent, and the cost of doing business was significantly less. The Town Board has been unwilling to assume responsibility for the water system, which has made funding options limited.

The staff here at NYRWA often receive individual accolades for assisting systems. However, this particular case has been a total team effort. I have asked for assistance from Circuit Riders Dan Tousley and Doug Smorol, and from our Groundwater Specialist, Steve Winkley. They provided various expertise and onsite assistance to keep the water system in operation.

Following the initial visit and tour of the system, I began researching funding options. Since the system is privately owned, the search for funds can be much more difficult. I sought guidance from the NYSDOH, in particular, Rob Swider and Kristine Wheeler. They provided me with the training necessary to gather the correct information, timelines for submitting the data, various support, and engineering basics.

Once the assessment of the water system was completed, and it was documented that the system may be eligible for funding, we conducted the first of a series of public informational meetings. At this point, our team included another agency. Chris Nill, from RCAP Solutions, provided information to the community and also collected household income data and completed a report documenting the median household income. With this information, we were ready to

proceed. The majority of the residents were supportive of the idea of a new water system, even with the suspected rate increase.

Rodney and I completed the pre-application for funding through the Drinking Water State Revolving Loan Fund (DWSRF), and submitted it to the State for approval. With a great deal of assistance and support, the application was approved for over \$600,000.00 of improvements, one-third of which will be grant funding. The remainder will consist of a no-interest loan to be paid back over 30 years. With this information, another public meeting was held to inform the residents, answer questions, and get their feelings on the project. Once again, the majority of the residents were very happy and looked forward to the completion of the funding process.

Currently, the proposed work and rate increase needed to pay for the loan portion of the funding are being reviewed by the NYS Public Service Commission. Since the system is privately owned, all rate increases need to have prior approval from the Public Service Commission.

As you can see, a lot of work has gone into this funding process over the past year and a half. Without the help of a great deal of agencies and people, it may never have gotten this far. The owners have persevered when advised they would never get funding, and have also managed to keep the antiquated system in operation. This story shows just how important it is to have open communication lines between water systems and regulating agencies, and how if everyone works together, sometimes even the impossible can be achieved.

This project is still quite a way from completion, but I think it is a good illustration of how the NYRWA can assist with various system needs. We may not have the answer to every question, but we most likely know someone or an agency that does, and will use every contact necessary to be of assistance. Lastly, this has been a project 2 years in the making, illustrating that we are willing to go the distance to support your efforts, even when instant gratification is not attainable. ♠

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Youngsville Water Department