

## "Questions to ask about the settlement"

by Betsy Helsel and Housley Carr, Guest Columnists

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The plan by the majority of the Plumstead Township Board of Supervisors to sign a settlement agreement with Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority that would significantly expand the sewer system in Plumstead, reported April 22 in *The Intelligencer*, raises a number of important questions that citizens should demand be answered.

**1)** Why isn't Plumstead Township fighting what its own attorney initially said is a "frivolous" lawsuit by Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority?

Plumstead has been among the most successful townships in central Bucks County in warding off massive residential and commercial development by implementing--and standing up for--zoning that protects our natural resources, and by emphasizing local control over development issues. Through our innovative village zoning and aggressive land preservation efforts, Plumstead already has built and approved its fair share of new projects. Why are we reversing course now, and opening up Plumstead for unplanned development?

**2)** Why has Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority agreed so quickly to the settlement terms the majority of Plumstead's board proposed? Isn't the whole idea of a settlement for the parties to meet halfway?

The fact is that the proposed settlement is a give-away to Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority. The majority of the board is giving the sewer authority everything it wants--especially the right to be the sole provider of sewer services in the township. The settlement will eliminate the possibility of any groundwater recharge on future projects, because Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority has absolutely no interest in protecting Plumstead's aquifer, and will not permit the use of alternative systems such as spray irrigation that would replenish our groundwater supply.

**3)** Why doesn't the majority of Plumstead's board understand that this settlement is only the first step in the county sewer authority's long-term expansion plan in central Bucks?

The reason that Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority was so quick to accept the board majority's settlement terms is that the agreement will significantly extend the sewer authority's reach into Plumstead. As soon as the initial allotment of several hundred new sewer connections in the agreement is used up, developers will sue to get more connections and the board majority--again, afraid of a court fight--will capitulate, just as is it doing now with this settlement. Plus, as the expanded sewer system further depletes our groundwater supply, Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority will claim to "save the day" by offering to provide public water to what will become our ever-expanding "development district."

**4)** Why isn't the majority of the board willing to investigate what impact the expanded sewer system would have on Plumstead's fragile groundwater supply?

The township's Environmental Advisory Committee has unanimously recommended that a study be undertaken immediately to determine whether the majority's plan to pipe an additional 65 million gallons a year out of the township's aquifer would leave Plumstead with a sustainable water supply. A similar study in Hopewell Township, New Jersey--which sits atop geologic formations very much like those in Plumstead--found that 16 of 17 proposed sewer extensions would result in serious groundwater-supply problems. A Plumstead study would cost only a few thousand dollars and take only a few weeks. Why not take a moment to gather the facts? Why rush to settle?

**5)** Why is this important public-policy issue being discussed behind closed doors?

Nothing is more critical to Plumstead's future than a reliable supply of clean, fresh groundwater. The proposed settlement would require the township to rewrite its sewer plan--an action that typically would call for input from its Planning Commission, Environmental Advisory Committee, Plumstead citizens, and neighboring municipalities. But the board majority has opposed efforts to make the discussion public. Why?

Citizens should demand answers to these questions, because the future of Plumstead Township is at stake. We strongly urge the three other members of our board to delay a decision on settling with Bucks County Water & Sewer Authority until a study is conducted to determine the impact of an expanded sewer system on our long-term groundwater supply. Failing to do so would be irresponsible, and a violation of the public trust.