 *“Nelson never turned a blind eye on the right way to do things.”*

**

***2023 Watershed Management Committee Newsletter***

Town of Nelson, NY Watershed Management Committee (WMC):

Jim Cunningham, Supervisor David Rezak, chair

Donna Isbell, Eatonbrook representative Randy Fuller, Eatonbrook representative

Jennifer Marti, Town Councilor Wayne Matteson, Upland representative

Jeff Edgarton, Tuscarora representative and Town Code Enforcement Officer

 **You might be thinking…I get enough junk mail already…and:**

1. Why am I receiving this newsletter and survey from the Nelson Watershed Management Committee (WMC)? Nelson’s waterfront owners need to know what we’ve learned and what we’re doing to preserve our lakes.  We will share your feedback anonymously as we make related recommendations to the Town Board.
2. Why do we need a WMC? Growth in our lake communities impacts our lake health. The WMC seeks to mitigate impacts, research best practices and funding sources, and monitor the lakes.
3. I’m already a good Lake steward. You probably are a good lake steward.  We aim to share a wide variety of water quality strategies with ALL Nelson waterfront owners.
4. The Town of Nelson’s Lakes can take care of themselves. These man-made lakes cannot take care of themselves. They were built in steep valleys. Fast-moving water carries tons of phosphorus-rich sediment to the lakes. As cars proliferated, a very active human presence followed. Ongoing development CAN harmonize with lake health, IF we all follow best practices!

**Why Should We Protect Our Lakes?**

By Jim Cunningham

Highly desirable lakes like Tuscarora and Eatonbrook enhance  surrounding property values, thereby contributing significantly to the  Town’s economy and natural assets. Madison County distributes sales  tax to the fifteen Towns within the County based on the Towns total  assessed value. The Town of Nelson has benefited tremendously due  to the value of properties around our lakes. Nelson has one of the  lowest Town tax rates of the fifteen Madison County Towns. Nelson’s  assessed values have helped us to lower your Town Tax substantially  by a historic 8.7 percent in 2023. Look at your annual Town and  County Tax Bill and you will see under (Taxing Purpose) the % change  in levy from the prior year (% increase or decrease). Even if you do not  have property on one of the Town’s lakes, ALL residents of the Town  benefit, as our low tax rate impacts everyone within the Town. The  largest department the Town manages is the maintenance of our  many miles of roads. The Town maintains and plows over 100 lane  miles of roads. Plow trucks these days cost nearly $300,000 each. The  price of fuel, salt, sand, culverts, pavement, and labor has just  exploded in the last few years. I cannot overstate the value of our  lakes to help make the Town of Nelson one of the most affordable  towns in Madison County.

The Nelson Town Board and Planning Boards all spend a significant amount of time striving to find a balance between development and  environmental preservation, however in our Town they are one in the  same. The Town’s Board recently formed a stakeholder’s team to work on updating land use regulation to correlate with the Town’s comprehensive plan. The stakeholders want to encourage reasonable  growth that fits our community goals, including ensuring that the  wonderful environment we have in the Town of Nelson is preserved  and sustainable. A few years ago, our Town board formed the Watershed Management Committee which has worked hard to improve our lake’s water quality with many successful projects and  many to address in the future. I thank everyone who has worked on this committee over the years, especially our leader David Rezak.  Nelson’s Town Board has added residential property owners living  within the waterfront zone that now serve on the Planning board,  Zoning board of appeals, Board of assessment review, as well as our  Codes Enforcement Officer. Our lakes had few waterfront residential owners on these boards in the past. These changes provide an improved balance across the Township for growth and preservation.

Our lake’s water quality is a key economic driver for the area which supports tourism, property values and employment. A decrease in water quality would have long lasting negative impacts on our Town’s economy. For this reason, protecting the water resources of our lakes is also protecting the economy of the Town of Nelson. You can find Town email addresses of all our staff on our web site at Nelson-NY.Org and a link to our Town Facebook page. Please email me with your suggestions to help keep our lakes healthy for years to come.

**The Town of Nelson Comprehensive Plan**

By Jennifer Marti

In 2017 myself and other members of the Nelson Comprehensive Plan Committee along with help from Madison County Planning Department undertook the creation of a community survey to guide the direction of the updated comprehensive plan. Nearly 300 residents of Nelson and Erieville participated in the survey. The results indicated that recreational opportunities and our natural resources which include Tuscarora and Eaton Brook reservoirs are important to the fabric of our community. More than 60% of survey respondents believe that protecting the water quality of the lakes was important. Seventy percent of residents believe stricter septic testing for waterfront homes was required.

The survey results highlighted the need for the development of a watershed management plan which the Watershed Management Committee (WMC) grew out of. In March of 2020 members of the

WMC began the process of developing a plan that ensures the lakes receive careful stewardship. The framework of the plan was presented to the Town Board in March of 2022.

Our community is fortunate to have a wealth of recreational opportunities within our town boundaries for every season of the year. Our lakes provide swimming, motorized and non-motorized boat access, open water, and ice fishing. Stoney Pond provides ample hiking and Nordic skiing opportunities as well as fishing and non-motorized boat access. Stoney Pond, the Nelson Swamp, and Tioughnioga are accessible to hunters of all types. The Fall of 2023 will hopefully see the completion of the Nelson Cedar Swamp Scenic trail, a raised walkway through the north side of the Nelson Swamp accessible from Route 20 and the town office building for those looking for a meander through the woods without getting their feet  muddy. The town is also in discussion with the DEC for the development of an archery range at the Tinsley Hill recreational area.  Sound forest management and a recent timber harvest from Tinsley Hill has provided revenue for improvements to the park.

As the Park and Recreation liaison for the Nelson Town Board, I am proud of the work that my neighbors and fellow board members  have accomplished through the Comprehensive Plan.

 



**THE WATERSHED MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE HAS IDENTIFIED IMPORTANT BEST PRACTICES FOR WATERFRONT OWNERS**

The Town of Nelson Comprehensive Plan recommended an update for the Town’s two-page waterfront landscaping guidelines.  The WMC adopted Cornell Cooperative Extension’s very complete waterfront landscaping brochure:

http://cceonondaga.org/resources/landscaping-for-water-quality-in-the-finger-lakes

Hard copies are available in the lobby of Town Hall.

Landscaping is part of a larger set of strategies that waterfront owners can embrace to assure good lake stewardship.  Most owners in the WF Zone understand that their actions impact lake health. Here is a personal responsibility checklist:

▪ Lawn care- Use phosphorus-free fertilizer (like 5-0-5, look for a zero middle number) or don’t use fertilizer.  Avoid discharging lawn cuttings in the lake or tributaries.

▪ Septic Systems- Maintain a healthy septic. Regular pumping, filter cleaning and occasional inspections will keep bacteria  and nutrients out of the lake water. Similarly, pet poop should be removed and kept out of the lakes and tributaries.

▪ Hazardous waste and prescription drugs- Vehicle and household waste must be disposed of carefully and properly.  Prescription drugs should not be flushed.

▪ Boats- Maintaining a properly running power boat reduces its impact on the lake. Operating the craft at either low speed or up on plane reduces erosion and shoreline damage. Operating at mid-throttle range, plowing through the water with  the bow in the air is a waste of fuel. Even small boats can make damaging wakes. If trailering your boat or welcoming your  guests’ watercraft, be sure it has been cleaned, drained and dried to avoid introducing invasive species to Nelson’s lakes.

▪ Landscaping, renovating or building- Design and maintain your waterfront to enhance lake health as described in the  “Landscaping for Water Quality” brochure above. Planting native species that filter sediments is a great start. Use effective erosion barriers and filters. Follow DEC guidance/best practices when excavating, building or renovating near the shore.

**If we ALL practice good lake stewardship, our Town of Nelson lakes will stay healthy for generations!**

**Nelson Watershed Management-Water Quality Survey**

**Section 1-Sedimentation**:

Sedimentation brings unwelcome nutrients and phosphorus into our lakes from runoff.

1. **Where are the most pressing sedimentation/run-off hot-spots and impacts that you have observed?**

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2. The Town recently passed a revision regarding building height measurement in the Waterfront Zone (WF).  Eatonbrook residents sought more flexibility in building and renovating.

Eatonbrook is less densely built-up. Tuscarora has lakefront properties two or three deep.

Eatonbrook has a public boat launch. A portion of Eatonbrook is not in Nelson but in Town of Eaton.

Perhaps the two lakes would be better served with two WF zones.

-WF-T for Tuscarora and

-WF-E for Eatonbrook.

Land use ordinances might more specifically address each lake’s unique characteristics.

Considering the differences between the two lakes,

**how much do you agree or disagree that two different WF zones would serve the respective lakes better?**

(1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree.

3. Regulations limiting long-term recreational vehicle use in WF zone were implemented five years ago primarily in response to inadequate  septic systems near the lake shore. How much do you approve or disapprove of **ongoing regulation of long-term recreational vehicle  use in the waterfront zone?**

(1) Strongly approve 2) Approve 3) Neither approve nor disapprove; (4) Approve; (5) Strongly approve

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**Section 3-Septic Systems**-**current state**

Aging on-site septic systems and outdated technology can have a significant impact on water quality, public health, and the local economy.  Approximately 23% of US households have on-site septic systems and the USEPA estimates that there is an average 20% failure rate for on-site  systems nationwide. 100% of the Town of Nelson’s two lakes are using on-site septic systems. All of our homeowners rely on their septic systems  for safe and effective treatment of their wastewater before it filters into the soil. Recycled water from a septic system can help replenish  groundwater supplies, but if the system is not working properly, it can contaminate nearby waterbodies and drinking water wells. Aging and  antiquated septic systems are among the main sources of increased nutrients in waterbodies, including phosphorus, which contributes to an  increased likelihood of nuisance algae and **harmful algal blooms (HABs)** that are toxic, in the United States.

(USEPA, 2017; Navutskt, 2018)

4. **Which do you have?**

(1) Septic tank and leach field

(2) Holding tank

(3) Advanced (aerated) system with aeration, chlorination etc.

5. If you have a septic tank and leach field, **do you know where both are?**

(1) Yes

(2) No

6. If you have a septic tank or holding tank, **how often do you have it pumped?**

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 **Section 4-Septic Systems-waterfront stewardship-**

*The Town of Nelson’s Comprehensive Plan recommends periodic septic inspection for all septics “that influence” the lakes.  It also calls for the Town to consider septic inspection upon deed transfer in the waterfront zone****.***

*Madison County and the Towns of Eaton and Cazenovia have rigorous septic regulations. For example:*

• *Town of Eaton’s regulations call for septic inspection on deed transfer for all properties up to 2000’ from the lake shore.* • *Cazenovia calls for periodic septic inspections for the entire watershed, not just waterfront and not only in their waterfront zone.*

*We need input from waterfront owners about septic maintenance requirements:*

7. How much do you agree or disagree that we **can protect our lakes with measures similar to those in Cazenovia and Eaton**? (1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree.

8. How much do you agree or disagree that **we can protect our lakes by regulating septics on properties that are within 500 feet of the  lake shore?**

(1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree.

9. How much do you agree or disagree that the **Town of Nelson should require visual inspection of the components of your wf septic  system to ensure they are in good working order upon deed transfer?**

(1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree.

 10**.** How much do you agree or disagree that the **Town should require septic pumping every four years in the waterfront zone?**

(1) Strongly agree 2) Agree 3) Neither agree nor disagree; (4) Disagree 5) Strongly disagree.

11. Periodic septic pumping is a proven septic system health measure. If the Town negotiates a discounted “neighborhood pumping”  arrangement with septic pumping contractors, **how likely would you be to participate in this program?**

(1) Strongly likely; (2) Likely; (3) Neither likely nor unlikely; (4) Unlikely; (5) Strongly Unlikely

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**Section 5.** Please identify yourself to avoid duplication.

Survey to be completed by Nelson waterfront property owners only-One survey per Town of Nelson waterfront property, please!  We will share your input anonymously, with the Town Board.

Should the Nelson Town Board consider changing regulations, there will be a public hearing.

In addition to expressing your opinions here, we encourage you to participate in that process.

12. Name\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Email\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you have additional related concerns or questions for the Watershed Management Committee?

If so, please provide your preferred method to hear from a member of the WMC.

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If you do not wish to speak with a WMC member, leave this question blank.

*Thank you! Your input will help our Watershed Management Committee and the Town of Nelson champion water  quality issues. Hard mail recipients, please fold and tape the survey pages (or stuff them in an envelope) add a stamp and  mail to Town Clerk at the address below:*

*Watershed Management Committee*

*c/o Town Clerk*

*4085 Nelson Rd.*

*Cazenovia, NY 13035*

***OR***

*scan the survey pages and email them to: dmrezak@syr.edu*

***OR***

*Whether you received the newsletter and survey via hard mail OR EMAIL you may fill it out online instead of mailing: https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/B5R9DZH OR use the QR code below.*

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*(Hard mail recipients may type the survey address into their browser to access the electronic survey as well.)*

**Watershed Management Committee**

**Town of Nelson**

**4085 Nelson Rd.**

**Cazenovia, NY 13035**