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November 17, 2020

Mary Roderick, PhD  
Regional Planner  
Land of Sky Regional Council  
339 New Leicester Highway, Suite 140  
Asheville, NC 28806

Re: Survey of Rhododendron Drive and Azalea Avenue (and surrounding areas, including Highland and Oakdale Roads) adjacent to the city limits of Brevard, NC

Dear Dr. Roderick,

As you are aware, we have had many problems over the years with malfunctioning septic tank systems and/or straight pipe sewage discharges in this area, as documented in part by the Wastewater Discharge Elimination (WaDE) Program. Prior to beginning the WaDE surveying process in Transylvania County, we were asked if we had specific areas of concern with respect to malfunctioning systems and/or unpermitted wastewater discharges. With its long history of problems and concerns, the underserved Rhododendron/Azalea/old Hwy 64 area was one of the first on our list of potential survey candidates.

As expected, the survey yielded chronic problems in the area, prompting the need to issue repair permits. One of the requirements when issuing a repair permit is to “do no greater harm” to the environment than the existing system (in its malfunctioning state) has already done. Another requirement is that any repair will reasonably enable the system to function properly and protect public health.

We have continued to monitor septic issues in this neighborhood. Currently, approximately 25 occupied homes have had septic treatment and disposal issues, and two additional vacant homes have had known failures in the past. A few homes have been able to repair their systems, but unfortunately, this has proven impossible to achieve in several instances. Some of the malfunctioning systems are non-repairable due to soil wetness issues, insufficient available space, inability to meet required setbacks and other site issues. The choices in these cases are limited to either pumping and hauling the sewage to an approved wastewater treatment facility or abandoning the structure as a residence.

The lack of municipal sewer in this area has compounded the issue by limiting anyone’s ability to respond to problems and concerns as we would all like to be able to do. In addition, some septic tank systems which are not directly (visibly) malfunctioning are likely contributing to the overall degradation of the small streams which bisect the area due to their advanced age, small size, proximity to the water and other site factors.



Speaking with some of the residents has also brought to light another issue not directly related to our on-going survey. Most of the criteria which have prevented the issuance of repair permits in this area have also precluded the issuance of new septic tank system permits, which in turn has denied property owners the ability to utilize their properties. This issue seemed to rank second only to the concern over the chronic malfunctions in the area.

In a time of tough economic decisions and limits on funds for infrastructure construction, there is no question that some projects should be put off until such conditions improve. The addition of sewer to the Rhododendron Drive and Azalea Avenue areas is definitely not one of them. These areas and the people who live there have been underserved for decades with respect to the provision of utilities. They live on essentially city-sized lots, but have to rely on aging septic tank systems which are rapidly approaching the end of their life spans (if not already there) with no space or proper site conditions for replacements other than municipal sewer. The public health implications are important enough for all of us to band together and finally see this project through to its completion.

The attached list documents the homes with septic issues. Some of these homes have had issues dating back to the WaDE survey and others have developed issues since or are now vacant.

Please contact me if you have any remaining questions or concerns.

Sincerely,



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