

Town of Clarks Hill
First public hearing – OCRA wastewater grant
October 14, 2025

PRESENT: CARLA J. STEARNS, PRESIDENT, MARLIN “BRAD” WARF, SHERRY SUMNER

OTHERS PRESENT: DIANA L LUPER, CLERK/TREASURER, BRUCE LUPER PT

**SPECIAL GUESTS: NEIL BROOK, KLIENPETER ENG, MAUREEN HAYDEN,
COMMONWEALTH.**

**OTHERS: BEV HOLLADA, CAROLYNN HOUCHENS, KATHY WOLF, KATHY VERNON,
CAROL COURSER, CLARK WHITLEY, MELINDA VANPELT**

Neil Brook, Kleinpeter Consulting Group

Good evening, I am Neil Brook with Kleinpeter Consulting Group. Notice of this public hearing was posted in the Journal and Courier on October 1, 2025.

The purpose of hearing tonight is to discuss the application for grant funding through the Indiana Office of Community and Rural Affairs. We are applying specifically for a wastewater grant in the amount of \$750,000 dollars. We will be contributing a local match of \$10,104,000 in the form of SRF and RD funds. It is anticipated that the breakdown will be \$5 million from SRF and \$5,104,000 from Rural Development.

We have a proposal due to OCRA back on October 24. There will be a second public hearing in December.

We want to make sure that the citizens are fully informed and have the opportunity to voice and concerns or support for the project and ask any questions.

Funds available for the OCRA wastewater project are limited and applications are very competitive. If the town is successful with their application, award announcements should be in February 2026.

Maureen Hayden, Commonwealth Engineers

I can speak briefly to this project. As you know, we've been working about this project for two years now, starting with an OCRA planning grant that discussed the needs of water, wastewater and stormwater. And while we found issues with water and stormwater, it was clear that the wastewater utility was in the most dire need. So, after extensive review of both your wastewater system and the many concerns of IDEM – the Indiana Department of Environmental Management – we concluded that your wastewater treatment plant had exceeded its useful life and must be replaced.

That's the preliminary engineering report that we produced for the town that we used to submit for this funding. So, I can provide more details if needed on these issues, but basically, the treatment plant is aging. There are no replacement parts for some of the most critical pieces of equipment, and this has resulted in multiple violation notices from IDEM documenting affluent violations at the wastewater treatment plant. We don't want to have any effluent violations. In essence, that's raw sewage going to the creek. Again, it's a matter of the treatment plant is aging and it doesn't have anything to do with operation or maintenance of the plant. It's as good as it can be, but it's an old, old plant that needs to be replaced. Also, the wastewater treatment plant is currently only running at approximately 50 percent of operation capacity. This is not sustainable and action is required to ensure that the town will be able to adequately treat the wastewater. Driving the town's decision to replace the existing wastewater treatment plant are health and safety concerns that have been raised by IDEM. So, they've been repeatedly documented by IDEM and it has triggered what's called an agreed order from IDEM. That's the most serious action that can be taken against a town's wastewater treatment plant. It compels the town to take action or to face increasing amount of monetary fines that grow heftier each time as time passes.

We did look at several cost-saving alternatives, and that included a wastewater regionalization study that we did for the town that we got grant money from SRF to do that wastewater regionalization study that looked at regionalizing with a neighboring community. But, that regionalization study concluded that having the town replace its wastewater treatment plant with a new wastewater treatment plant was actually the most cost-effective solution.

As for the scope of this project, we are proposing to construction a new wastewater treatment plant that is appropriate for this size community. That would include a new lift station, new emergency generator, new chemical building with chemical feed equipment, new mechanical screen, SPR basins, a list of things that need to be present at the wastewater treatment plant to be able to handle and process your wastewater. We'll also look at putting a new maintenance building and new laboratory equipment. The cost of this project is sizeable, over \$10 million – which Neil referenced – as to why we are seeking funds from multiple funding sources. This is a hefty amount for a town of this size and income level. We know the town has already increased your wastewater rates twice this year and we applaud you for being proactive in that action. We also understand that those increases have had an impact on residents. That's why we are actively and aggressively seeking as much grant money as we can.

So, in addition to this OCRA money that Neil is helping us go after, we've also applied for grant and low-interest loan funds from the State Revolving Loan Fund that Neil made

reference to, and USDA Rural Development. All three of these funding sources take into account both the town's small size and relatively low median household income and they take that into account when considering how much potential grant money, low-interest loan money they can secure.

Neil Brook

Any questions?

Carla Stearns, Town Council President

I don't have any questions but I want to state for the record that all of the extra time that our maintenance guys, Andy and Jaden, have to do because of the agreed order. We are doing above and beyond what IDEM is asking so that they know that we are doing our best, that they know that this can't be fixed either. But, we are truly doing everything that we can, including cleaning stuff almost weekly that usually gets done once every other month. We are going above and beyond but that does take more of his time away from other duties within the town.

I've asked Diana to talk a little bit about what the extra costs for maintaining the equipment.

Diana Luper, Clerk-Treasurer

We've spent several thousand dollars on the chain because it's broke multiple times. He's been using old parts trying to fix it. And we've had vac trucks come in and suck it out. And then, just last Friday, the RBC went down again. I have not talked to him since I left work today, so I'm not sure if the guy came out. He was supposed to come out today. What it's done is, there is a cement block that the mechanism sits on and it broke at the cement block, which they would have to move that thousand pound gear box out of the way to fix it

Bev Holladay Isn't it draining into a ditch as it is?

Diana Luper

I'm not sure it's draining into the ditch but into the retention pond.

Bev Holladay

But, if we get a lot of rain, it will make it to the ditch.

Maureen Hayden

You have two of these RBCs and one of them is already out.

Diana Luper

One is completely down, and they used it to fix the other one.

Maureen Hayden

I should mention, briefly, the schedule.

If we secure this funding, which we will know by the spring. If all goes well, we'll start construction in September 2026. It takes that long for us to secure this funding and move throughout the design process, move through the permitting process. It's a long, tedious process whenever you're using federal or state funds to make sure that we jump through all of the hoops that are required for state and federal funds. But we hope to start construction on the new WWTP in September 2026.

Carla Stearns

Do any of the residents here have any comments that they would like to make for the record on this subject?

Carolynn Houchens

What happens if the plant goes down before all of this grant stuff happens?

Carla Stearns

We're going to stop going to the restroom. Port-a-pots everywhere. I don't know. I don't want to find out.

Carolynn Houchens

When was the last time the trucks cleaned it out?

Carla Stearns

It's only been two months. It had to be done because of the cleaning of something going down that they had to do clean it out.

Diana Luper

It's \$5,000 every time.

Carolynn Houchens

\$5,000?

Diana Luper

That's five truckloads.

Kathy Wolf

So, if there is a complete breakdown and a bad rain like we had before, you get three inches of rain, everything will still flood, right?

Carla Stearns

Are there any other comments?

Bev Holladay

If the loans and the grants don't go through because there's no business, there's nothing to really give it to us, if they're not approved, then what do we do?

Carla Stearns

The loans that will go through. It's the grant funds that we may not have. Is that a fair assessment to say?

Neil Brooks

It is. But, with the shape that it's in now, we have a competitive grant.

Maureen Hayden

We don't want to ever make any promises we can't keep.

Carla Stearns

But, even if we don't get the grants, we're going to get loans.

Maureen Hayden

Yes, so there is, I know, with the confusion on the federal level, it does appear that there is some uncertainty. But right now, and we feel like into the future, there is a significant amount of money in the state revolving fund that is set aside for projects like this. We also know there is a significant amount of money in USDA Rural Development that has been set aside for these kind of project and, also money from OCRA which comes from HUD, set aside for projects like this.

Brad Warf

I don't mean to backtrack, but if we build a new wastewater treatment plant, will it be big enough for our town to expand any at all? Or is it just built for what we got here now?

Maureen Hayden

We did take into consideration potential expansion of the community, and it's also going to be built in such a way that the wastewater treatment plant can also be expanded if you do have more residents or businesses. It's a flexible piece of equipment, so to speak, that can be expanded as the town expands.

Brad Warf

With Eli Lily going in, you know, there might be a lot more people looking for homes.

Carla Stearns

Even if they're not in Clarks Hill, if they're out around it, I don't think the county is going to let them put in septic systems with our system right there. I think they'll have to tap into ours. They may have their own water, they may have their own well, but I think they have to sign with us.

Carolynn Houchens

Well, with Lafayette coming out it is and more people wanting to move this way. And, even with the run out we're supposed to...or if we get more business or we get some business.

Clark Whitley

Well, if we get like the gas station out there, if we put a Dollar General or something out there, it would be nice if we could accommodate.

Diana

Told the crowd that we can't get a Dollar General, Because we are not on a highway.

Carla asked if there is any other questions. Hearing none.

We close the Special Meeting

Thank you to Neil Brook and Maureen Hayden for coming

X Carla J Stearns

CARLA J. STEARNS
TOWN BOARD PRESIDENT

X ABSENT

MARLIN "BRAD" WARF
TOWN BOARD

X Sherry Sumner

SHERRY SUMNER
TOWN BOARD

X Diana L Luper

ATTESTED
DIANA L LUPER/ CLERK/TREASURER