

Village of Red Hook
SEWER DEPARTMENT REPORT
March/Early April 2026

We had Sewer Team meetings on Mar. 5 & 19, Apr 2. Present were Village Engineer Robert Flores, Ablen Amrod (Mar 5), Sewer Operator Les Coon, DPW Foreman Jake Smith, Sewer Clerk Jen Cavanaugh, and Mayor Karen Smythe. We look forward to welcoming Perry Allen to the team!

I'd like to take some time to update everyone, including the public, so we all have a better understanding of the current status of our sewer operations. There is a fair amount of misinformation that is currently circulating.

To recap, it was April 1, 2025, just over one year ago, when Delaware Engineering took over operations of the WWTPs for the Village. At that time, there was effectively no treatment happening at the plants. DEC had done their inspection that led to our Consent Order on March 21, 2025. After months of work including shutting down Plant B (Red Hook Commons or Old Plant) for 7 weeks and basically restarting all aspects of Plant A (the new plant) operations from beginning to end, the plants were brought into compliance by June. Our current operator, H2O Innovations, took over operations August 1, 2025, with our DPW handling the day-to-day work through Fall. With board approval and a contract adjustment, H2O also took over day-to-day operations as of January 1, 2026.

The treatment process is a biological process, meaning that there are live bacteria or “bugs” doing the majority of the treatment. Managing the health, quantity, age, and effectiveness of the bugs requires daily monitoring. It is both an art and a science. Wastewater comes to the WWTPs 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The system, while not fully optimal, is certainly functioning. The system is no longer broken and hasn't been since last June.

ODORS – Since the replacement of the blower fan pulling air from the EQ tank into the Odor Control was completed on March 2, there have been no odor complaints related to the WWTPs. We did get one odor complaint on March 31 from Smith St. “..getting strong the closer I walk to the woods. Hard to tell if its wet foliage growing in the swampy area..” After investigation, plant operations were normal and there was no odor present at the WWTPs.

NY ALERT NOTIFICATIONS/NON-COMPLIANCE EVENTS

There have been no NY Alert notifications or Non-Compliance Events since Feb. 24.

The Village received a Notice of Violation from DEC dated Feb. 26th related to the Feb. 20 & 24 non-compliance events. The required response with a schedule of implementation for the short-term upgrades (primarily the expanded EQ tank) was sent by March 20th as requested. This was accepted by DEC in a letter dated March 30. The key dates are 1) submit designs for short-term upgrades – July 20, 2026; 2) Start construction – March 20, 2027; 3) Complete construction of short-term upgrades – June 30, 2027.

ALARM SYSTEM

One of the short-term upgrades is a high-level alarm system which was installed on March 6. Now, if the EQ tank fills to a level right before it starts pumping to the above-ground temporary extra EQ tank, an alarm will sound. Also, if the mud wells in Plant A reach a certain level, an alarm will sound. We will be adding an alarm for Plant B mud wells and the Pump House tank as well. This alarm runs via wireless cellular service through an app that is accessed via cell phone. Our operator (2 people), our DPW Foreman, and I are all connected to the system. It has activated once since installation. On Friday March 20 starting at about 11:15pm the EQ High-level alarm sounded. (I can attest that it is very loud!) H2O was able to get to the plant even before the pump to send wastewater to the above-ground extra tank had kicked on. They confirmed the pumps were working properly, checked everything at the plant and eventually figured out how to turn the alarm off (!). Not clear if it would have resulted in a non-compliance event but the point is not to find out.

COLLECTION SYSTEM – FROZEN PIPES

All the previously frozen pipes are now thawed. No damage has yet been detected from the freezing.

REMAINING REPAIRS NEEDED

There are some repairs that still need to be made including replacing the return activated sludge valve in Plant B on the West side. When an attempt was made to replace the valve, the surrounding pipe broke. So further work needs to be done to replace the pipe as well as the valve. The one UV sensor that was not reading correctly has been fixed. One of the generators needs a new switch, though we are looking into whether the new generator can support both plants. At some point we would like to add automation for both plant sand filter backwash systems. Currently they are done manually. The anoxic mixer in Plant A is faulting frequently. This mixer keeps the solids from settling on the bottom of the anoxic tank. Once reset, the tank just needs extra mixing. Further investigation needs to be completed before a solution can be determined.

ENGINEERING AUDIT

Delaware Engineering has conducted an audit of sewer operations. The final report has not yet been submitted.

RED HOOK COMMONS PUMP HOUSE UPDATE

As I reported to the Board on Monday, April 6, on Sunday, April 5, the Village was notified of a sewage backup at Red Hook Commons.

All of the waste from the four buildings at Red Hook Commons (94 apartments) goes to an underground tank in a pump house to the north of Red Hook Commons. It gets pumped by a grinder pump (in theory it grinds up all the rags/wipes/solids before being pumped out) into piping that takes it to Plant B for treatment.

What they found was that the grinder pump had failed. There are two pumps in the pump house. There was one that hadn't been working for a long time. The other one had been replaced in 2021 and had been working fine until Sunday. There was no prior indication that this pump was at risk of failure. But this does point to the importance of redundancy.

With no workable pump, DPW Foreman Jake Smith called in Superior Sanitation to pump out the tank. These pumps are not standard, easily replaceable, off-the-shelf pumps. Red Hook Commons had turned off the water to all buildings on Sunday. After Superior fully pumped out the tank, they turned the water back on. Additional pumping by Superior continued on Monday.

Jake found the same make and model for \$7500 but with a 4–6-week lead time. He found a few other options - none of them great. In the meantime, he took apart the two non-working pumps and successfully put one back together using parts from each. By Monday afternoon, the newly configured pump put the pump house back in service.

There was never any spillage aside from an interior backup in the superintendent's apartment on the lowest floor. The plant operated and processed all wastewater as required. This pump failure will result in additional costs - but no non-compliance. A significant “leak” was detected coming from one of the buildings. Turns out a slop sink had been left running, leading to significantly higher volume of wastewater going to the pump house. It appears that may have had an impact on the pump.

A replacement pump for \$7500 is now on order. Jake also found a used pump for \$1200 including delivery which should arrive the week of April 13. Once that arrives, we will have two working pumps, and they will alternate being used - controlled automatically via the control panel. Jake did find some issues with the control panel and one of the check valves in the pump house. More work to follow. Given that the current working pump and the other one arriving shortly are not new, we will keep the new replacement pump on order, so we have appropriate redundancy for these pumps.

Since Jake was able to fix the pump, the emergency costs have been contained - any alternative would only have been much more costly. I thought there might be a few odor complaints as the pumps were taken out of the tank and laid on the ground outside, the tank lid was open all day, and when Superior pumps out tanks, it can often smell, but we did not receive any odor complaints during this period.