

Hearing set for new storm-drainage law

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LAKE PLACID — At a rare joint meeting, the governing boards of the village of Lake Placid and the town of North Elba will hold a public hearing Monday night on a new law meant to help manage pollution from stormwater draining into Mirror and Placid lakes. The hearing will be held at 7 p.m. in North Elba Town Hall.

"Fundamentally, we're very concerned about preserving the quality of the lakes," said David Ackerman, co-chairman of the Lake Placid-North Elba Water Management Committee, which drafted the proposed ordinance between October 1997 and December 1999.

"Mirror Lake is the gem of the Lake Placid community," Ackerman said, "and Lake Placid is the source of our drinking water. Once a lake 'turns,' it's very difficult to get it to turn back — and that's what we hope to prevent."

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"turning" Lake Placid and Mirror Lake into polluted bodies of water is the runoff from Lake Placid's streets, parking lots, driveways and developed building sites, according to the "Water Management Plan for the Lake Placid-North Elba Sub-Watersheds."

A 1999 article in the Lake Placid Shore Owners Association's newsletter described, in a nutshell, the natural process of a lake's death and metamorphosis:

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"A young lake is usually free of excessive nutrients and vegetation. As the lake ages, it becomes greener, shallower and warmer. Over many years, the lake will eventually become a swamp and possibly a field," the newsletter reported.

"Under normal conditions, this process takes hundreds of years. This process will greatly speed up when human activity is present. Run-off from lawn fertilizer and construction, improperly maintained septic, yard clippings and other nutrient input accelerate the aging of a lake."

Other harmful ingredients in stormwater runoff are silt from erosion, sand and salt from winter roadways, motor oil residue

washed off streets, and dirt and other debris washed off sidewalks and gutters into Lake Placid's storm drains.

"Urbanization, in addition to affecting the quantity of runoff, has also been shown to have an adverse impact on water quality," a 1996 study of New Jersey's Great Swamp Watershed observed. "The changes in land use associated with urbanization increase both the types and loadings of pollutants found in runoff."

The Stormwater Management Ordinance being proposed for Lake Placid and North Elba is meant to help eliminate extra stormwater runoff from developed lands into Mirror Lake and Lake Placid, Ackerman said, slowing the natural aging of the lakes and

helping to keep them as nearly pollution-free as they are today.

"The whole object of the ordinance," Ackerman explained, "is to have no additional runoff over what we have naturally from a piece of developed property."

"It's a very modest proposal," Ackerman claimed, characterizing the ordinance's provisions as a simple "course correction" in development regulation.

"It's just a matter of taking more care with designing to manage runoff," he said.

Ackerman observed that the new law his committee developed was modeled substantially on the "Stormwater Management Regulations of the Lake George Park Commission," which went into effect in Sept. 1990.

"The conditions there are very

similar to what they have here," Ackerman said, "and their regulations have already survived the test of time."

The new Lake Placid-North Elba storm-drainage law would require that anyone constructing or expanding "buildings, structures and impervious surfaces ... such as pavement, blacktop, macadam, packed earth and crushed stone" file for something called a "stormwater management permit" with the local building code enforcement office.

To receive such a permit, a builder would have to show plans that include stormwater control measures — like drywells, lined pits containing crushed rock, blind ditches or retention ponds — that would keep most of the stormwater drained by the property on the

property itself and out of Placid and Mirror lakes.

The proposed ordinance distinguishes between major and minor development projects, and small, private landscaping or gardening projects are exempted from the ordinance's requirements.

Besides storm-drainage provisions for construction projects, the new ordinance would also apply to any erosion-producing condition that results in soil or silt washing into the lakes.

"We don't have combined sewage and storm drainage treat-

ment" in Lake Placid, Ackerman observed, so whatever washes down the storm drains ends up in Mirror Lake or Lake Placid.

The beauty of both bodies of water and the quality of the Placid Lake drinking water are positive assets for everyone living and working in the Lake Placid community, Ackerman said. Likewise, the township's storm-drainage problems could have a negative effect on the whole area if left unaddressed.

"It's everybody's problem," Ackerman said.