



WHITE PINES CIVIC ASSOCIATION

Ms. Lisa Bonnett, Director
Illinois EPA
P.O. Box 19276
Springfield, IL 62794-9276

September 29, 2015

Re: Suspect Funding Fraud

Dear Director Bonnett,

In early September the White Pines Civic Association (WPCA) acquired information that the Village of Bensenville lobbied the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (IEPA) for a loan to replace the water mains located in the White Pines community. At that time an inquiry was made to the Governor's Office to determine the status of said loan as the Village of Bensenville had not communicated to the residents of White Pines that they were taking such action. Attached to this letter, also included below, you will find a response to our inquiry from a Ms. Sarah Seelbach.

After reading Ms. Seelbach's response it immediately became apparent that, in our opinion, the Village of Bensenville was shamelessly less than truthful in their facts for the application of said loan. As evidence, the following is a rebuttal to Ms. Seelbach's response by WPCA president, Gina Mellenthin;

Dear Ms. Mellenthin,

Your inquiry was forwarded to the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency for response:

State infrastructure loans, issued through the Illinois EPA, are made to whomever owns, operates, and maintains your public water system. In this case, it would be the Village of Bensenville.

*(Rebuttal) By a 1945 agreement between the developer of the White Pines subdivision, Mr. Branigar, and the Village of Bensenville, the water system would remain an asset of White Pines until such time that the White Pines subdivision would be annexed to the Village of Bensenville. To this date the White Pines subdivision has not been and will not be annexed. Therefore, White Pines retains ownership of the system. Bensenville **does not** own the system! The Village of Bensenville does sell water to the residents of White Pines, utilizing the White Pines mains, but does little to no regular maintenance on said system.*

Agency staff has met with various Bensenville Village officials, as well as the Village's engineer, to discuss proposed improvements to the drinking water distribution system. It is our understanding that the White Pines area was developed approximately 70 years ago. The Village has performed general and emergency maintenance for decades.

(Rebuttal) The Village of Bensenville HAS NOT performed recommended or required general maintenance, such as flushing lines and hydrants, on the system. The last maintenance recorded was during the mid-1990s. The only emergency maintenance was to stem water leakage from breaks. The Village could not bill White Pines residents for said maintenance.

The WPCA has had various companies and engineers look at the system and all were in agreement that the system does not need to be replaced in its entirety and that more cost effective relining or directional boring for repair and replacement of the lines were very viable options.

The construction of the water system was done so long ago that water mains and service line locations are in backyards and other non-public right of way areas (some water lines have had buildings built on top of them).

(Rebuttal) Water mains are located in relatively easily accessible easements and we are unaware of any significant structures built on top of them.

The Village is proposing to upgrade the area with water main replacements (records indicate the age of the mains and breakage history warrant such work), upsizing of water mains to provide adequate fire protection flow levels (a few homes have burned down due to local fire departments refusing to serve this area due to inadequate flow/facilities) as well as new service lines where necessary from the front of all houses to the public right of way.

(Rebuttal) Stated in the Village of Bensenville's own records, the average annual cost to repair all breakages in the White Pines subdivision is between \$8,000 and \$9,000. The Village collects approximately \$30,000 per month from the subdivision and these funds are placed in a general capital fund to cover said breakages.

NO houses have burned down because "local fire departments refused to serve this area." While we did have three separate house fires over several years, units from the Bensenville fire district DID respond. A house fire, located on Ridgewood in White Pines, spread quickly and burned violently. Most of the structure was consumed in flames by the time the fire district arrived. The units on scene went into a defensive mode, protecting surrounding structures, instead of an offensive mode. The home was uninhabited and the fire chief made the decision to let the fire burn itself out and not waste manpower or resources. The other two fires were contained by the Bensenville fire district and put out. The Bensenville fire district did not refuse to service the White Pines community and were successful in extinguishing the fires.

Additional information that is stated in the Village of Bensenville's own records, once again provides more evidence to the false reports given by the Village to the IEPA. Flow tests were conducted by the Village in April 2015 and proved that White Pine's flow rates were well within national standards for our type of residential density. Our area is rural in nature and homes are approximately 100 feet apart (requiring 750 psi). Our area should not be required to meet flow rates of highly industrialized areas (1,500 psi); however, these were the flow rates that have been used to prove the false statements made by the Village

Agency staff advised the Village, that while this work may result in a significant increase in user charges, the Illinois EPA could provide funding if the Village demonstrated the revenue would be in place to provide the ability to repay the loan. A public hearing would be required before the Agency could issue Planning Approval in accordance with the loan rules.

(Rebuttal) Over the past two years the residents of the White Pines community have attended many public meetings and hearings concerning the issue of the water mains. The overwhelming majority of the residents made it known, loud and clear, that they DO NOT want the Village of Bensenville moving forward with a project that requires a full replacement of the system. Residents in White Pines favor a plan that would require only partial replacement in combination with alternative methods of repair, such as relining and directional boring. A full replacement of the system would be a tremendous financial burden on them.

In addition to the IEPA loan payments for the proposed replacement project delivered by the Village, each White Pines resident will be charged an additional \$8000 by the Village to run and hookup service lines from house to main (as outlined in letters the Village recently sent to residents).

In essence, given the above, it is our belief that the Village of Bensenville has sold the IEPA a bill of goods in order to obtain funding. In reality, the WPCA has looked for financially viable alternatives to the Bensenville proposal and have on the table, at this very minute, three documented options from the county of DuPage and Illinois American Water. Furthermore, a fourth option is currently in development. As such, the WPCA is asking the IEPA to look into the deceptiveness of the Village of Bensenville and delay any advancement in the loan request of the Village until a full investigation can be completed.

Respectfully,

The White Pines Civic Association Board

Gina Mellenthin



Richard Duzinkas

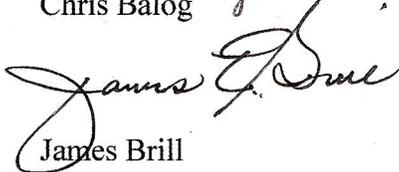


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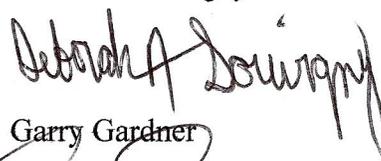
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cc: file/water/092015

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Lisa Madigan, Illinois Attorney General
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