

October 13, 2023

Name
Street Address/PO Box
City, State Zip

RE: Property Meets Requirements for the Mandatory Inspection Program
FL Address

Dear Property Owner,

The Chautauqua County Health Department (CCHD) works each day to prevent disease, promote wellbeing and protect the Public's Health. As part of those efforts, ensuring all Chautauqua County residents and visitors have access to safe and reliable water is a specific focus of our Environmental Health Division. Findley Lake is a critical natural resource in Chautauqua County and is currently suffering from serious water quality issues. The lake is recognized by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as an impaired waterbody on the New York State Section 303(d) List (<https://mywaterway.epa.gov>). Many areas around the lake have loose gravelly soil, shallow groundwater depths, and/or limited space for septic systems that meet New York State requirements. These conditions allow poorly treated sewage and wastewater to reach groundwater quickly, which increases well and lake contamination.

The CCHD Environmental Health Division is tasked by New York State to ensure that septic systems are properly installed, maintained, and repaired. In an effort to reduce the number of septic systems that are negatively affecting the lake water quality, Chautauqua County established the **Mandatory Inspection Program** in 2016 (Sanitary Code, Article 4, Section 12), which aims to identify inadequate and failing septic systems around Chautauqua County lakes. Properties subject to the Mandatory Inspection Program include those with property lines within 250 feet of the lakeshore that either have no record of a septic system being installed under County permit or were installed with a County permit more than 30 years ago. **If you have received this letter, your property meets the criteria for the Mandatory Inspection Program.**

The inspection process is outlined below:

- 1) The septic tank(s) and distribution box / seepage pit will be uncovered by the property owner or a hired contractor before the CCHD representative arrives.
- 2) The CCHD representative will flush dye down a toilet, check all wastewater line connections, and observe the flow of sewage / wastewater through the entire septic system.
- 3) A septic tank pumper will need to be present at the inspection, at the owner's expense, to pump the tank in the presence of the CCHD representative to determine the size and structural soundness of the tank(s).

If the septic system is determined to be failing, the system must be corrected. If a correction is required for a system that was installed without a County permit, the entire system will need to be replaced. Based on previous inspection

data we expect the majority of unpermitted septic systems will need to be corrected with a full septic system replacement.

Septic System Criteria That Will Result in a Failed System

Each system will be evaluated individually. There are common issues that have been observed with unpermitted systems that will likely require an entire septic system be replaced. These issues include:

- 1) A septic tank with a volume less than 750 gallons.
- 2) Seepage pits and adsorption fields that are less than two (2) feet above the ground water table; the distance is required to allow wastewater to receive additional treatment by moving through soil.

Septic System Estimated Costs

Please note the cost of septic system corrections vary depending on the type of correction that is required, site access, site topography, lot size and offset distances between septic system components and the lake, water wells and groundwater. If local contractors and County staff are able to satisfy size requirements and separation distances required for a conventional system, installation costs will likely range from \$8,000 to \$16,000. If lot size requirements and separation distances cannot be satisfied, a professional engineer will be required to design and oversee the installation of a system. To replace an entire system on a small lot that cannot achieve offsets, installation costs typically range from \$25,000 to \$35,000 plus engineering costs, which may add another \$5,000 to \$8,000.

Septic System Maintenance

Additionally, all septic systems have routine maintenance costs. At very least, septic tanks should be pumped regularly to prevent solid waste from leaving the tank. If the system has an aeration motor or a pump, those devices need to be serviced annually and require constant electricity. Some professionally engineered systems have very specialized filters and filter media that must be changed and serviced regularly. When people do not spend money to maintain their septic system, they shorten the life of the septic system. Unmaintained septic systems cannot function as they were designed and contribute to inadequately treated sewage and wastewater ending up in groundwater and in Findley Lake.

Developing a large-scale sanitary sewer along with a storm water management system will have a positive effect on the long term water quality of Findley Lake and water supplies (e.g. wells) in the area. If a public sewer district is established and the Town is moving forward with plans to develop a public sewer, these Mandatory Inspection Program inspections will not be required. Thank you for considering how your septic system, and all septic systems, could be affecting Findley Lake water quality and how a municipal sewer system around the lake could improve lake water quality in the future. We are providing this information to you to ensure that, as a county resident, you are equipped with as much information as we can reliably provide, in order for you to make informed decisions in the best interest of your family and the community. If you have questions about what type of septic system exists at your property or you have information about a recently installed septic system on the parcel please contact the office at 716-753-4481 or CCHHealth@chqgov.com.

Sincerely,



Jessica Wuerstle
Director of Environmental Health