

Educators say no pat solution to village problems

Free Press Rockwood reporter Lorraine Root sat down with three educators from the University of Guelph to discuss the water and sewage proposals for the village. Since the Ontario Municipal Board will hear the pros and cons of the proposals next Tuesday, we publish the results of the interview, since the Free Press considers that every side of the question should be exposed for the benefit of village residents.

By Lorraine

That's what Tuesday, October 20th, 1971, represents to villagers in Rockwood after five years of mulling, bungling, juggling, and haggling. Then residents will see their plight presented for consideration to the Ontario Municipal Board and an entire village will be dependent on its wisdom to determine the feasibility of plunging 985 moderately income residents into an approximate 14 million dollar debt or find a more adequate method of solving a serious problem.

Aspects for consideration in this vital matter are innumerable, necessity of pollution curtailment, landscape planning and building control, environmental ambitions, and of major importance, the ability of a small reasonably affluent community to handle the potential tremendous costs.

Three University of Guelph educators, in the studies of environment and water resources, have shown concern over Rockwood's situation. They feel that with their close proximity to the problem area they would be falling short of their reason for existence if they did not apply some thought to its solution. Taking time off from their active university calendar they discussed the village problem as they see it.

No pat solution Professor Peter Chisholm agreed with Professor Hugh Whitely and Dr. Trevor Dickinson that Rockwood definitely has a pollution problem but, that in dealing with it, there is no pat solution. "I think," he said that often the practicing engineer or the government group whose job it is to solve problems make a point to give the impression that there is a very neat solution and that there's only one solution to the problem because people like to hear that answer. They feel very comfortable and secure with that but I think that for any problem like the Rockwood one, there isn't just one neat solution - there are a number of solutions depending on what Rockwood wants.

Do they want to grow? Do they want to be small?, and, depending on what direction that the village wants to go, or the regional government wants the village to go, illustrates that there could be a number of solutions considered. He is concerned that, in the easy acceptance of the O.W.R.C.'s proposal, no question has been raised as to whether it is the best one for the Village of Rockwood.

No one is questioning the pollution problem," he said, "the magnitude or the extent of it". What Professor Chisholm does question is the measures of inspection which the Wellington-Dufferin Health Unit has applied in ascertaining beyond doubt that the septic systems in the trouble area of the Village are beyond repair. "There may be some that cannot be fixed" he said, "but I would doubt if one could turn around and ask if they have examined every system or the majority of the systems to see what would be involved in fixing some of them."

Professor Hugh Whitely who has studied the situation in Rockwood extensively, feels that in many areas of the village where series of buildings occur on lots narrower than subdivision requirements, some very absurd tank situations exist but that rather than incurring debt for an expensive system, the residents should be encouraged instead to realize that close scrutiny and remedial action would bring people up to standard.

Holding tanks Referring to the actual problem systems in the village on which, according to a mapped layout based on the Department of Health's surveys, the contamination is concentrated in only certain areas, Dr. Trevor Dickinson referred to the updated method now being used in Chicago where holding tanks are being utilized and sewage is trucked away from the city to other means of disposal.

"You can always install a holding tank and truck away the sewage" said Professor Whitely. "It's always possible, but whether it's acceptable or not is another situation." According to Dr. Dickinson, a resort on Puslinch Lake which had a seepage problem into the Lake is applying the same method of disposal. A holding tank has been installed and the sewage is

trucked to the Guelph sewage treatment plant. "It solves the problem very simply" said Dr. Dickinson. "It was nothing that the proprietor initiated. It was the Health Department which helped him do it and they worked with him on it." "Such a method," said Professor Chisholm, "would be required for an individual, not for the entire Rockwood village, but certainly for the bad areas, that is one possible solution."

"Now the answer that comes back on this," said Peter Chisholm, "is that it costs too much. It costs too much to truck things around but if one really does a study of the cost of that versus those suggested for a tertiary plant, it's an entirely different ball park. It would be a great deal less and it's feasible. Considering the nominal cost of operating a septic tank system then it's far more expensive and it looks absurd, but certainly, if you looked at the figures to put sewers in Rockwood and add to it the cost of private connections then you're talking about so much money that almost any other solution begins to be a possibility."

"It's an extremely expensive system," he concluded adamantly. The three engineers agreed that there's an attitude of "that's reverting back to the old time" when trucking sewage away is referred to but they can relate actual instances in the immediate vicinity where this is happening today. The General Electric Company in Guelph is trucking industrial waste down to Ohio for incineration and right now some of the industries in Guelph are having to clean out catch basins and storm sewer systems for, what is termed as "the worst kind of sewage."

Need new wells Quered as to whether it would be practical for Rockwood to install water only Dr. Dickinson felt that it would not be addressing oneself to the whole problem. "I think some of the well problems could be solved by putting in a few new wells" he said and agreed with a statement from the Wellington Dufferin Health representative that evidence indicates that people would use more water than in the past and, if septic tanks are already overloaded in the area, the problem would be aggravated.

"But," he said, "I think that they don't really know whether it's practical or not and, in the interest of a small village, considering the indebtedness they'd be placed in, rather than apply somebody's hypothesis, a more detailed investigation is warranted to indicate whether in fact it would be a problem."

"In this particular case" broke in Peter Chisholm, "common sense would dictate that if we don't have the opportunity to carry out a detailed investigation then we're going to be con-

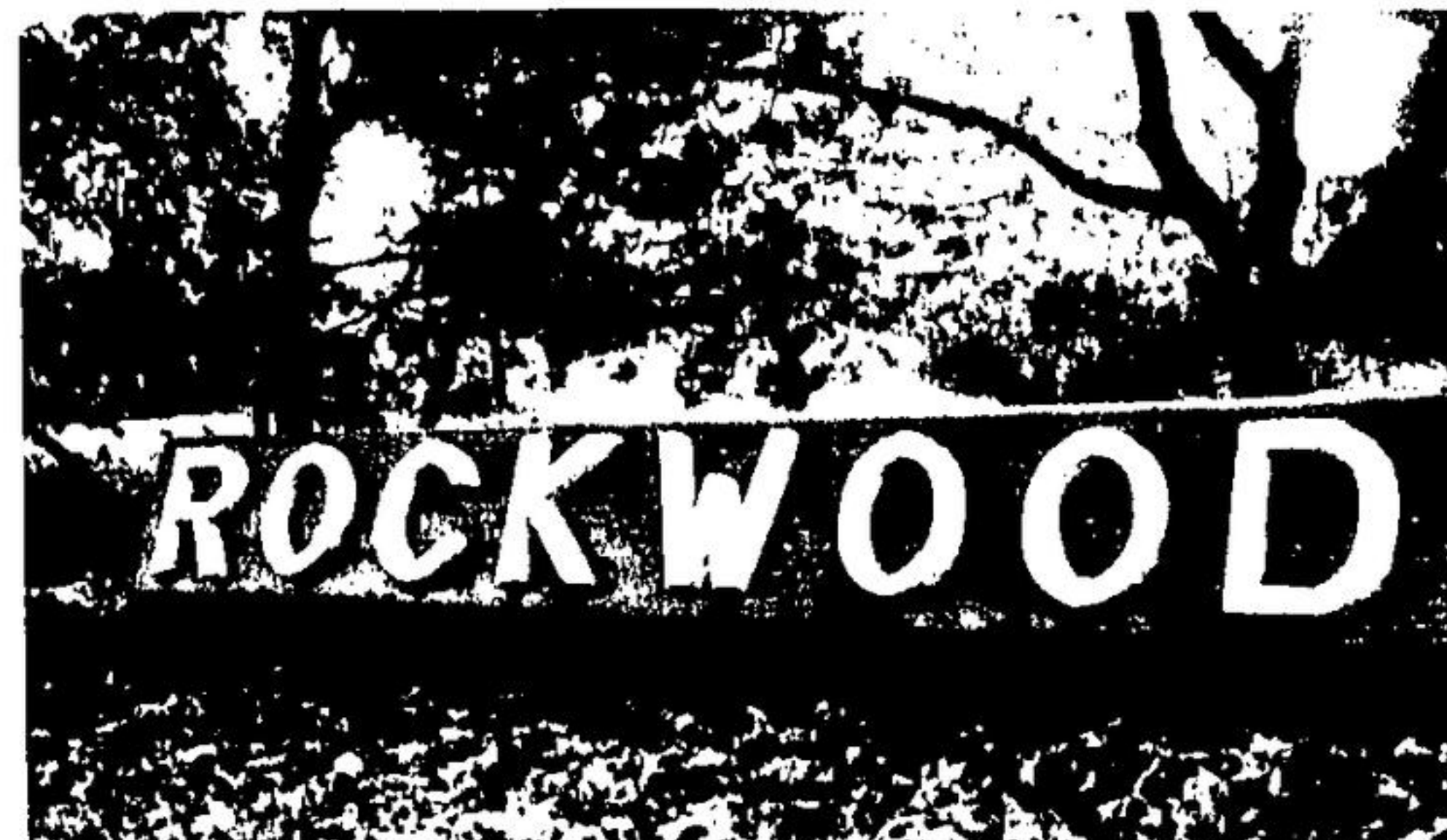
servative and we're going to say "it looks as if further overloading the septic tanks is going to be a problem", and you can see the common sense in that rationalizing. "But, he continued, "to apply common sense and generalisms of this nature to a very specific question where the implications of a weak argument might be a totally unnecessary debt level to the municipality, I'd say that for a village involved with only 250 houses you can darn well afford to spend \$50 a house to see if you can save almost a million dollars and this is the thing!"

Professor Chisholm is not blaming the O.W.R.C. for Rockwood's situation. He feels that they were asked to do a specific job and that it is not the O.W.R.C.'s responsibility to refuse the Rockwood trustees request for the system. "Because", as he put it, "Let's just turn the argument around for a minute. Let's say the OWRC were requested by the township council to look at this problem and they came back within two weeks and said 'No, you cannot afford sewers and waters.' Can't you see the people in the Village of Rockwood saying - 'What does the O.W.R.C. know about our problem?'"

What the University men really feel is that the O.W.R.C. should be constantly looking for ways of solving the problems of the smaller communities. Dr. Dickinson said that the suggestion comes out that there is no other economic or practical way of doing it, but that is a misleading assessment because there are other alternatives and other ways now being used which are less expensive than the overall system the O.W.R.C. is recommending.

They feel that too often the attitude of the designer of these systems is to just go ahead on a more or less prescribed basis and, in this case they have approached the problem of waste management for the village of Rockwood on about the same basis as they would approach it in the larger municipality of Toronto. All three engineering specialists agree that there are a number of lower levels of servicing which would solve Rockwood's problems and yet still fall short of either the scope of the system or the associated costs that are involved in the larger systems.

"The attitude of the designer in this particular case", said Hugh Whitely, "has, I feel, been prescribed pretty well by habit rather than trying to find a particular system for a particular problem". He feels that the O.W.R.C. should do more research into the small community needs and come up with a system that would adapt itself to that particular community environmental needs rather than prescribe one large expensive plan for every case.



"I understand", said Peter Chisholm, "that all the trustees originally requested was a sewer system, and, even though the request may not have included the wider system I can see, from an engineering point of view it would be sensible to do both at once. However, I think that the fact that they have slipped into both sewers and sewage treatment and water is an indication that they haven't really given too much thought to the details of the situation in Rockwood, its feasibility, whether it can be paid for, and what it represents as an impact on the village."

Effects River? The question of sewers and water installation in the village of Rockwood has aroused strong opposition from other area residents who feel that the new system will strongly affect the standard and purity of the Eramosa River and its natural environment. However, such attitudes have been allayed when local witnesses have said that the river is already polluted and that, in many instances, raw sewage is constantly being drained through the rock table right down to the centre of the watershed into which everything flows.

Professor Chisholm feels that there is a much broader issue here. "The fact of the matter is", he said, "that nobody really knows exactly what the state of pollution is in the Eramosa River and that for this to be used as a consideration in the design of new waste management systems the O.W.R.C. should have undertaken an appropriate survey in the water course to allow the public to realize that there is a base problem pollution. A few years ago not too many people would have been concerned about carrying out such a survey prior to the installation of a sewage system but today people do require that the rivers are maintained at a high level or at least at the status

they are at the time they're put in." According to Trevor Dickinson, no such guideline study has been undertaken excepting one that was conducted at the University of Guelph from the school of Engineering when a Master's Thesis was compiled on phosphorous levels of the Eramosa River between Rockwood and Guelph.

"Only a few other random samples are the only authoritative data that are available," he said. "I know that the Eramosa River is not polluted," said Peter Chisholm, "because I take my children fishing and we catch trout right between the bend pond above the dam in Rockwood and all the way down practically to the Conservation area. There's good fishing in that region of the river and the river certainly can't be polluted to the level that would do damage to these fish otherwise they wouldn't be there. The Department of Lands and Forests stock the Eramosa River every spring and they stock it successfully."

Regarding the Eramosa in the direct vicinity of Rockwood, he agrees with some of the local authorities that "there is some indication that septic residue is flowing into the river because the phosphorous levels that the O.W.R.C. have found are higher than they should be from straight background natural levels. They've had a few samples which were pretty close to one part per day phosphorous and in the Eramosa River that is substantially above the natural levels you would expect from mineral sources in the water

central as to whether we ought to proceed on this basis of ignorance at this time when there are adequate scientific bases that can be introduced into the investigation to improve the whole approach."

How will the proposed installations affect the people in Rockwood? How will the people beyond the area be affected? Is the village planning set up adequately to curtail expected growth? Does Rockwood want growth and industry? Can they afford it or can they afford not to have it? Will the system remain adequate if Rockwood should increase in size?

Critical eye The university men view the situation and the alternatives with a critical eye. The Wellington Dufferin Health Unit representative, Clive Beardwood described Rockwood as a village presently geared for 1,700 people. He said that it could be a 15 year plan depending on the planning council. He felt that Rockwood should insist on an official planning and zoning board prepared to set up proper protective by-law and that a planned sewage expansion program is necessary. "If," said Mr. Beardwood, "it happens gradually, it can be controlled and new industry and growth absorbed the same way."

that for Rockwood's basic problem, there is no pat answer as to how growth within the village ought to be tailored to the ability of the natural environment to receive waste from the village. "Now I know" he said, "that the assimilative capacity of the Eramosa River in its present state would be overtaxed once the population in the village gets to be over about 2,000."

He feels that particular points should be stressed. "By and large, he said, "society has not begun to think in terms of limiting growth within a municipality to the limits which are permitted by the natural environment within which they have to live. This is one of the central issues in the matter."

"People want their cake and eat it too," he said. "They want limited growth and everything that goes along with increasing the contribution to the gross national product but the same time they don't want to change things in the process." Can a village of approximately 985 people actually afford the \$1.4 million cost as presented by the O.W.R.C.? Those who think they have the answers are certain that potential population increase which the system would encourage would help curtail expenses however as Professor

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