



57 Skenesborough Drive, Suite 2
P.O. Box 207
Whitehall, New York 12887
(518) 499-0871 Fax (518) 499-1120
villageclerk@whitehallny.org

Francis Putorti
Mayor

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Statement from Village of Whitehall Mayor Francis Putorti

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The circumstances of the past week with the Village of Whitehall's drinking water system were not the result of action or inaction by any one person. Rather, the water emergency was the culmination of various factors, some recent and some that may have accumulated for periods of time not fully understood yet, but all of which descended upon the Village at once. Sunday's water main break brought to the surface the location of a water leak that Village crews had been trying to locate for weeks and months. You might recall that our water operator reported months ago the need to conserve water, and the Village took action to encourage our citizens to do just that. Within that time frame, Village staff continued efforts to locate the leak location, while also managing our daily drinking water needs, street maintenance, and also our sewer system which has its own challenges.

Sunday's water main break identified the location of the leak, and also itself caused a significant instantaneous draw on our water system. Once that leak was fixed, and the system did not return to normalcy, it became clear that other issues were upon us. The Village's normal day to day water usage, combined with leakage related to the age of our water system, the age of our water system, and the drought of the past few months, all converged to provide a perfect scenario where the head pressure at Pine Lake was no longer sufficient to push water to the Village's drinking water treatment plant, and on into the Village.

So what did we do in response? I declared a state of emergency, and we immediately went to work. We hired a contractor, and working with NYS DOH, NYS DEC, Washington County emergency management, NYS emergency management, our staff and our Village attorney, we set about solving the immediate problem of restoring flow to the Village's water plant. We are doing that by actually drawing water from Pine Lake by pump. What this means is that we, as a Village, remain in a deficit situation whereby the volume of water in Pine Lake, even with the recent much-needed rains, is not enough to push water to our system.

We also took interim measures to reduce leakage and loss. This is done through a combination of efforts at Pine Lake, at our water treatment plant, and in working with NYS Rural Water Association members who helped us identify leaks in our system that needed immediate attention. On Monday, our crews along with help from our neighbors from Granville and with support from the Town of Ticonderoga, will be making more repairs to another identified leak. This will help us cut our water loss.

We are also still asking our businesses and residents to help us conserve water. While many of us like long showers or love to take a bath, until we get some rain to refill and recharge Pine Lake, we need to

take shorter showers; do laundry with full loads in the washing machine; clean our dishes with the least amount of water possible; and generally conserve, conserve, conserve, our drinking water.

All of these efforts will help us through the Winter and hopefully on to the return of Spring rains. But that isn't enough. We are also accelerating our plans to work on improvements and telemetry that will allow the Village to better control flows of water to our system, which will help us conserve our resource at Pine Lake. Pine Lake has served the Village for decades, and with proper support, we hope that it can continue to do so for decades to come. Even with that, if we find that additional water sources are needed, we will evaluate that as we move forward.

None of the factors that lead to this situation were ignored. Quite the contrary. The Village has been working for years on both its water and sewer systems. There are many areas where both our water and sewer systems have significant needs. We have worked to address these needs while also always remaining cognizant that our Village taxpayers simply cannot afford to pay for all of these necessary repairs at once. We have developed plans to fix our aging infrastructure, and have been working through executing on those plans. We have applied for, and received, many grants to help us with these efforts and we thank the State and Federal government for their assistance through the years. The recent developments have now adjusted the priorities within our project lists, but our needs remain significant and expensive.

We have to acknowledge the significant amount of support that Whitehall has received. We are Washington County. When we need something, our neighbors show up. New York State sent massive support from DEC, DOH, Office of Emergency Management, the Incident Management Team, and probably others that I don't have listed here. Sunday night Washington County Emergency Management was on site gearing up the immediate support the Village needed, and they have been here ever since. DEC forest rangers walked our water line through Dresden to assess the status of that water line. Our staff has worked around the clock and all our residents need to know how hard our entire staff works day in and day out. Last but not least, our attorney has helped me run the point on the volume of issues and factors that I have had to evaluate on a sometimes minute-to-minute basis. This entire team has helped us restore drinking water to the Village.

We are not done yet. Not even close. We are still working off of a temporary solution that cannot be continued indefinitely. However, we have a plan, and we are working on executing that plan. In the coming days, weeks and months, I will continue to advocate for the Village to all of our elected officials regarding the Village's needs. I am confident that we will get through this.

I want to thank the Village residents, businesses, and everyone impacted by this emergency. Your calls and support have helped. Your patience has been very much appreciated and not taken for granted. We do not know what the coming days or weeks will bring, but I am confident that we have the team assembled to get us through this.

Thank you.

The Village of Whitehall is an equal opportunity provider and employer.