

# DISTRICT DIGEST

Vol. 10 / Issue 2 / May-June 2021

BRUNSWICK SEWER DISTRICT *Protecting Maine's Environment*

## WHAT I HAVE LEARNED FROM COVID-19: PART 2

### HOW THE BRUNSWICK SEWER DISTRICT HAS COPED WITH THE PANDEMIC

*Full article, written by the District's Assistant General Manager, Robert A. Pontau Jr., is available at <https://www.mewea.org/newsletter/>.*

While much of what I wrote in that (previous) article holds true and the policies and practices are still in place, it is interesting to look back at how naive I was. More than a year later and only recently has life begun to resemble some sort of normalcy. My kids are in school five days per week, high school sports are happening, our office is mostly staffed, operations are in full swing (with modifications) and each day seems a little more like 2019.

For me personally, 2020 ended up being a pretty good year. As I noted in my last article: *"I am going to use this opportunity, this gift, to make improvements both personally and professionally. I will not be returning to normal."* Last summer was truly a blessing. Without sports, dance, and the mad rush that is my usual summer with my daughters, I spent countless hours with them. We hiked, camped, swam, biked, camped, tubed, water skied, went to the beach, camped and did I mention, we went camping? I spent nearly 40 nights in my RV last summer alone! Summer of 2021 is fast approaching, and I can already see it is going to be busier and more hectic. I will love every minute of it, but I will miss the relaxed pace of 2020.

Looking back at 2020 from a professional sense, it is not all that different than my personal perspective. The Brunswick Sewer District is running like the great operation it has been since its inception in 1947. We treated all 790 million gallons of waste we received. We removed about 2,200 cubic yards of solids that would have otherwise ended up in the Androscoggin River.

We received and treated more than 2.7 million gallons of septic waste. We shot more video footage, cleaned more lines, fixed more manholes, and issued more permits than ever before. We did all of this while meeting the demands of COVID and the CDC's associated protocols. Regardless of the demands put on us by outside forces, we continued to uphold our mission and serve our customers the best way possible.

So, what have I learned since my last article submission a year ago?

**Zoom fatigue is real.** Zoom, Meets, Teams and other virtual meeting platforms are great tools. They make us more efficient, reduce travel time and expenses, and allow us to communicate safely with a near in-person presence. I'm a huge fan, but there is a downside. Would you have ten in-person meetings a day? Probably not. Don't schedule more than a few virtual meetings in a day.

**Virtual conferences and classes work.** I attended both the MeWEA and MWUA virtual conferences last fall. I also helped with a few JETCC classes. It's certainly not the same as seeing everyone in person. There is a loss of camaraderie and networking, but the Whova app and other experiences around both events helped bridge the gap.

**People love wipes!** When I first arrived on the wastewater scene, wipes were the big issue. The problem never went away, but it was mitigated for the time being. That changed drastically this past year. The BSD used to have maybe one plug up in our entire 80-mile system each year, maybe. This year we've had about a dozen. Pumps are clogging, lines are clogging, and septic waste is full of wipes. We are getting hit from all sides. It is time to launch another public education campaign.

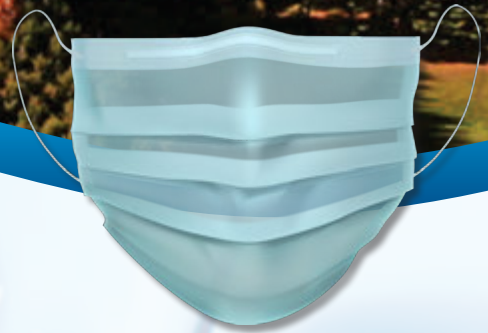
**I am more productive.** I said it. Working from home is more productive. Not all jobs are conducive to working from home, but those who can, should. It's time to end whataboutism, envy and proverbial thinking. It may not work for all jobs, or for all personalities. But for those who want to and can, working from home is the most productive way to work. I don't want to get political here, but it probably is better for the planet and our bank accounts. In 2019 I drove 19,000 miles. In 2020 I drove 12,000. That is a significant decrease. Imagine if everyone could cut out 1/3 of their travel miles.

**Find a balance.** I enjoy working from home and I know I'm more productive, but I do struggle to find a balance. The 4-10 workweek of 2019 no longer exists. I work when there is a demand. I may work on Saturday, but if I do, I'll try to go golfing on Tuesday. I try to maximize my time in the good weather. I cherish the flexibility but it's important to find a balance between work and leisure. It's also necessary to occasionally go to the office. I oversee 15 employees. Since most of their work cannot be done remotely, it's important for them to see me and know I'm there to support them.

This pandemic forced us to make swift changes in the way we work, live, and recreate. A rapid change was forced upon all our lives. It's been more than a year now, so we should be getting used to it. As I noted last year at this time, there is an urgency to return to "normal." I get it. Change is hard. Rather than focus on the negatives and a rush to return, look back at all the improvements made in the past year.

Living in a reformatted world is not without it's challenges. The District's IT costs have nearly

*(continued on back)*



(continued from front)

doubled this year. Our waste stream is significantly more contaminated with wipes. Offering in-person and remote options takes more time and effort up front. There is an awkwardness among us as we try to judge whether to shake hands, go for the fist bump, or just nod. Everyone's comfort level is different.

I am no longer a pandemic greenhorn. I'm aware of the beating Mother Nature can bring down on us. Although I've learned a lot in the past year, the closing statement from my 2020 article still rings true, so I'll end by repeating it:

*"I believe we should take the good from the past and*

*combine it with what we have learned from the pandemic to develop a new normal. A normal that is clean and safe, yet fun and desirable. A normal where work output soars, yet there is more personal time and enjoyment. A normal where we stop rushing and we learn to enjoy all that is around us, yet we can achieve more than we thought possible by utilizing technology and the tools that we have. The world has changed. I have changed. The district has changed. Rather than rush back to the way things were, I am going to use this opportunity, this gift, to make improvements both personally and professionally. I will not be returning to normal. Of course, I never was 'normal' to begin with."*

## Recognition

The following employees are celebrating an anniversary in the 2nd quarter 2021:

Jason Prout	Lab Technician	24 years
Darcy Dutton	Customer Service and Billing Clerk	18 years
Brandon Elwell	Collection/Pumping Operator	2 years

*Thank you, Jason, Darcy, and Brandon for your service to the district!*

## REMINDERS

### 2021 OUTSIDE WATERING CREDITS

Do you do substantial watering of a lawn or garden? Do you have a pool or hot tub to fill? You may be eligible for an outside watering credit. **TO REQUEST THIS ADJUSTMENT, PLEASE E-MAIL** [info@brunswicksewer.org](mailto:info@brunswicksewer.org) **or CALL 729-0148** in the spring of 2021 when you begin watering outside to be placed on the list for the entire 2021 season. **Your e-mail or call to us must be received before bills are processed. The District will NOT process any late notifications.**

### POLICY AMENDMENTS EFFECTIVE JANUARY 1, 2020

These two amendments require the installation of a sub-meter to receive an adjustment for outside water use. You may view the "Sewer Use Billing Adjustment Policy" which can be found on our webpage ([www.brunswicksewer.org](http://www.brunswicksewer.org)) under the "POLICY" tab.

**New Construction/Connections:** All new residential and commercial connections to the public sewer system who wish to receive a billing adjustment for water not entering the public sewer **MUST use a sub-meter** per the requirements noted in the "SUB-METERED use" section.

**Property Ownership Transfers:** All new owners of public sewer connected residential and commercial properties who wish to receive a billing adjustment for water not entering the public sewer **MUST use a**

**sub-meter** per the requirements noted in the "SUB-METERED use" section.

Please contact us should you have questions concerning these policy amendments.

### OTHER REMINDERS

When experiencing a sewer system problem, please contact the district **FIRST**. The 24-hour emergency number is **207-729-0148**. Make sure your plumber calls Maine Natural Gas before any tools are placed in your line.

Thinking of doing some yard work?

Before your contractor digs, call DIG SAFE (1-888-344-7233). It's free and it's the law.

Sewer bills may be paid by:

- Credit card or by e-check online, with a fee charged. (Fee is 2.75% of transaction amount with a \$1.95 minimum. Fee for e-check \$1) Please visit our website [www.brunswicksewer.org](http://www.brunswicksewer.org) for instructions.
- Automatic deduction from your checking or savings account (no fee charged). Go to our website and select the "I Want To" tab, then "Set Up Direct Payment." Complete the form and mail it to us at 10 Pine Tree Road, Brunswick, ME 04011 to complete the set up. Do not send in paperwork as a form of payment for your **current** bill; we need to process the set up with the banking institution **prior** to the billing.

Please like us on Facebook. Follow us @brunswicksewer on Twitter and Instagram.

## OUTDOOR WATER CONSERVATION

Reduce your water consumption and save on your utility bills! Ever hear of xeriscaping? Xeriscaping is choosing drought-tolerant, native plants. Xeriscape gardens generally use less water, and do not need pesticides or fertilizers. Some examples of plants that do well in Maine are butterfly weed, switchgrass, lowbush blueberry, and creeping juniper.

Rain barrels are a great way to conserve water and reduce pollution! Rainwater collected from your roof can be used to water lawns, gardens, and indoor plants.

(source: *MaineWater*)

### Additional resources:

<https://video.mainepublic.org/video/discover-the-beauty-of-xeriscaping-gtbwbl/>

<https://extension.umaine.edu/gardening/manual/plants-for-the-maine-landscape/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K8D6leyW47U>

## FUN FACTS FROM THE SEWER GUY



### MORE TOILET FACTS

- China has built public toilets for dogs.
- NASA's suction toilet off the International Space Station cost \$23.4 million.
- Cloves stuffed into pomegranates were the first air fresheners used.
- There are roughly 200% more bacteria on a kitchen cutting board than a toilet seat.
- Commonly used words to replace toilet: powder room, lavatory, outhouse, ladies' room, convenience, washroom, men's room, bathroom, dunny, bog, gents, garderobe, necessary, women's room, restroom, potty, privy, the smallest room, cloakroom, latrine, place of easement, water closet, john, loo, can, little girls' room, little boys' room, throne room, library, and facilities.