

Town of Constantia, Oswego County

The Town of Constantia lies along the northern shoreline of Oneida Lake. It encompasses 57 square miles of land area, 100% of which lies within the Oneida Lake watershed. The town is located along the southern border of Oswego County and has approximately 6.7 miles of Oneida Lake shoreline. According to the 2000 Census, 5,141 people were living in Constantia and the town had experienced a .06% population increase between 1990 and 2000. The median age in 2000 was 40 years and the average household size was 2.7 persons. Median household income was \$39,932. There were 2,351 housing units in the town, 13% of which had been built between 1990 and 2000.

Homeowners in Constantia rely on private septic systems. Several studies have been done to examine the feasibility of sewerage but the studies were not done concurrently with a land use plan. The town is situated on water-bearing sandstone with a thickness of about 250 feet. Wells in the town are subject to high sulfur content resulting in unpleasant odors, but do not pose a health threat.

New York State Route 49 runs through Constantia parallel to the north shore of Oneida Lake. The northern boundary runs through the southern edge of the Tug Hill Plateau. The town is primarily residential, with some light industry in Bernhard's Bay and Cleveland. The Village of Cleveland has water and sewer districts.

The Constantia Taft Bay Park in Bernhard's Bay provides opportunities for swimming, picnicking, baseball, volleyball, and tennis. A New York State ice fishing access site is located in Bernhard's Bay and a New York State boat launch is situated east of Cleveland. A trail along an old railroad bed is used for hikers, bicycling, horseback riding, and snowmobile riding. A 1996 NYS DEC study identified 25 environmentally sensitive sites in Constantia that contain endangered plant and animal habitats.

Assessment Results

The western portion of Constantia's shoreline was designated as a Priority Septic Area in the 2004 "Management Strategy for Oneida Lake and its Watershed." This area has a high potential for future non-point source pollution problems from failing on-site septic systems based on population growth, development trends, and environmental constraints such as limited soil permeability, seasonally high groundwater levels, limited topographic relief, and poor drainage.

Constantia has several laws in place that help to regulate the water quality of Oneida Lake including subdivision regulations. The Constantia Land Development Law includes provisions for development and site plan reviews. The Town has no zoning law in place but a Comprehensive Plan was developed in 1990. Constantia requires separation distances from wastewater system components.

Many of the Town residences that are situated along the Oneida Lake shoreline are in the 100-year floodplain but don't have flood insurance. Constantia experienced significant flooding during the past decade. The Town is familiar with FEMA's Flood Laws and the programs that they offer to reduce the insurance premiums for their residents.

Town of Constantia	Full or Partial Implementation	Not Applicable
Development	31 of 42 (74%)	2
Existing	13 of 20 (65%)	1
New and substantial redevelopment	20 of 42 (48%)	1
Forestry / Agriculture	11 of 12 (92%)	0
Forestry	10 of 10 (100%)	0
Agriculture	1 of 2 (50%)	0
Waterways / Wetlands	15 of 16 (94%)	0
Modified waterways	10 of 10 (100%)	0
Wetlands and Riparian Area Mgmt/Restoration	5 of 6 (83%)	0
Marinas	4 of 48 (8%)	0
Existing	0 of 20 (0%)	0
New	5 of 18 (28%)	0
Existing and New	0 of 10 (0%)	0
Roads and Bridges	22 of 26 (85%)	1
New	5 of 6 (83%)	0
Existing	12 of 13 (92%)	0
New and Existing	5 of 7 (71%)	1
OWTS	5 of 7(71%)	1

Summary and Recommendations

Constantia is not a Phase II regulated community. However, soil erosion and sedimentation issues are referenced in the Town's Comprehensive Plan, which covers restoring damage from construction sites to prevent negative impacts on water quality. The Comprehensive Plan also addresses development in the floodplain through minimum lot requirements and setbacks.

The Town Planning Board is currently updating its subdivision laws with assistance from the Tug Hill Commission. A model local law for Stormwater Management and Erosion and Sediment Control measures (developed by the NYS DEC and NYS DOS) is found in Appendix G. For non-regulated MS4 municipalities such as Constantia, this model law is a useful tool in limiting stormwater runoff and achieving greater oversight of construction activities in the community. Additional information about this topic is available in the Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council publication called, "Protecting Water Resources Through Local Controls and Practices: An Assessment Manual for New York Municipalities."

The Town follows the State Building Code for septic system specifications but there are no requirements for lot sizes of new buildings in relation to septic systems. A professional engineer designs the systems and the Oswego County Planning Department reviews the plans and performs site inspections. Most of the management practices currently identified by the NYS DOS as indicators of good onsite system management are being addressed in the town but local control for these measures are not addressed in zoning or subdivision laws. As a result,

municipal officials lack the authority to enforce maintenance and inspection practices necessary to ensure adequate septic function.

Based on the assessment process the CNY RPDB recommends that Constantia adopt a local law to regulate the siting, inspection, and maintenance of onsite septic systems. Many lake communities throughout New York State have developed local regulations to address onsite septic issues and a uniform onsite wastewater management model law is available in Appendix G. Localities have the authority to amend their existing laws to include the provisions of an on-site wastewater system model ordinance or they can customize an ordinance to address situations that may be unique to their community. Additional information is available in the Genesee Finger Lakes Regional Planning Council publication called, "Protecting Water Resources Through Local Controls and Practices: An Assessment Manual for New York Municipalities."

Municipalities have authority and primary responsibility for local roadway, bridge, and drainage maintenance. The CNY RPDB recommends that municipalities continue to implement stormwater controls and provide educational opportunities to update highway and public works department staff on current road, bridge, and drainage BMPs. Additional recommendations are found in a section titled "Road, Drainage Way, and Bridge Recommendations" (IV B) of the introductory narrative.

Municipal Contacts

- Steven Brill, Codes Enforcement Officer (past)
- Richard Colesante, Town Councilman
- Ronald Sakonyi, Town Supervisor
- Paul Baxter, North Shore Council of Governments
- Gail L. Swistak, Code Enforcement Officer (current)

Local Laws Reviewed

- Comprehensive Plan Draft #3 for Public Hearing, 1990
- Subdivision Regulations (1987)
- Site Plan Review Local Law (1988)
- Town of Constantia Land Development Law