

HAMMONTON uses lake aerator to reduce algae and weed growth

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HAMMONTON -- An innovative cleaning method for lake contamination has been tapped for the Hammonton Lake some seven years after it was initially proposed.

The Town Council on Monday unanimously gave the go-ahead for the town to enter into a pilot program with Clean-Flo of West Chester, Pa. For \$36,850, the town will receive the water-cleansing system, installation, maintenance as well as bacteria and enzymes used in the cleansing process.

"It's been a long road but it's great to have everyone on board," said Paul Galletta, who chaired an ad-hoc committee to study the cleanup of the Hammonton Lake, which has been plagued for much of the past decade with contamination.

The problems were so bad this summer that town officials closed the lake to swimmers. In 2005, the lake was only open for 13 days.

Galletta feels the Clean-Flo system can help the town re-open the lake, if all goes well, in summer 2007.

"There was a lot of public outcry to look at some new and maybe old ideas. It seemed like the lake was being neglected," Galletta said.

For Lou Rodio, the town's recreation director, Monday's decision can help the town revitalize one of its greatest assets.

"Thank you for keeping this alive," said Rodio, whose office at the Hammonton Lake Park sits on the lakeshore. "It would be great to get this back. We already have a lot of activity down there at the park. It would be great to have boat rentals and get people using the lake."

According to Clean-Flo President Brian Kling, the company's proposal is scaled back from previous ones presented to and eventually rejected by the town.

A Clean-Flo system will be installed at the beach area at the lake's southern end. The system will include a compressor enclosed in a fiberglass cabinet complete with cooling fans, filters and sound reducers. The cabinet will be located near the beach and will be electrically powered.

Kling said two to three weeks after the system is installed, "beneficial micro-organisms and enzymes" will be applied to the lake water "to feed on and reduce the nutrients available for weed and algal growth."

"These bacteria will also feed on the organic muck layer at the bottom of lake." Kling said.

The lake also suffers from weed growth. A bladderwort presence deprives the lake of needed oxygen.

Kling said the pilot project will last six months, concluding at the end of October 2007.

The goal is to keep the bacteria/fecal coliform levels below the 200 parts per 100 milliliters so the beach can remain open during the summer season, Kling said.

"If the system reduces the bacteria levels as compared to previous years and the beach opens, then the system will remain in place and continue to provide an ongoing benefit," Kling said. "If the bacteria levels are not reduced and the beach cannot open, we will remove the system."

Kling said the system must be installed no later than April 15, 2007, to be ready for the summer.

Bill Parkhurst, a member of the ad-hoc committee and a lake resident for over 40 years, questioned whether the town should focus on other methods to address the lake's contamination woes.

"The town could focus on storm water management technologies like improving the storm water inlets," said Parkhurst, who also voiced concern about the noise from the system's pumps. "Our monies and energies should go to keep the bad stuff out of the lake."

Mayor John DiDonato seemed satisfied with the project, which will be funded through the town's recreation fund program garnered from new development.

"Clean-Flo seems to be the right process. But we will still look at our storm water management plans," DiDonato said,

The project still faces potential roadblocks in the form of regulatory approvals from the N.J. Pinelands Commission and the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection.

According to John Helbig of the town engineer's office, Adams, Rehmann and Heggan, the NJDEP could be concerned about potential danger the system could have for fish in the lake. The lake is stocked several times a year mostly with hatchery-raised bass.

As for the Pinelands, Helbig said, "The commission's primary concern is preservation of the region's water quality, which is extremely acidic, and the flora and fauna supported by the ground and surface water resources of the region. If any supplementary materials were added to the water column that would alter the water chemistry, they'll have a concern."

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