

Oquaga Lake Improvement Association — Annual Members Meeting Summary

August 2025

1. Call to Order & Board Introductions

The Annual Members Meeting of the Oquaga Lake Improvement Association was called to order on Friday, August 29, 2025, by President Mark Millspaugh. Board members in attendance introduced themselves. No new lake members were present. A quorum being established, the reading of prior meeting minutes was waived; minutes are available on the Association website at oquaga.org. The meeting followed the agenda as set forth in the bylaws.

2. Treasurer's Report

Presenter: Marie

- A two-page (double-sided) handout was distributed covering:
 - **Summary Funds Report** and an Interim Financial Statement
 - **A Membership Paid/Unpaid List**
- The report showed funds in each account, with income and expenses since January 1st.
- The Association currently holds **\$67,598 in reserves**.
- **Dues remain \$100** for all members, including commercial properties (e.g., Marquee, which contributes to the website).
- **Unpaid dues** were noted to be **substantially higher than last year**, despite online, in-person, and mail payment options being available.
- A notice to delinquent members was sent approximately 10 days prior to the meeting, with **4 payments received** since then.
- Members were urged to knock on neighbors' doors if they're on the unpaid list — "they're getting a free ride."

Motion to accept the Treasurer's Report: Passed.

3. Committee Reports

A. Land Use & Zoning

- This committee engages with the **Town of Sanford**, attends town and planning board meetings.
- Key accomplishment: worked with the town to establish the **Lake Protection Overlay Zone** — a floating zone atop Oquaga Lake with more stringent setback requirements to protect the lake and shoreline.
- The committee **needs additional volunteers**, especially local members who don't have to travel far to attend town meetings. The town is more comfortable making decisions affecting the lake when the Association is represented.
- Contact Mark after the meeting if interested.

B. Event Planning

- Committee members include **Lil, Kathy Millspaugh, and Linda Hamilton**.
- An attempt was made this year to revive the **Field Day** (traditionally held first Saturday in August at Scott's), but the effort came together late and the new park in Deposit was already booked.
- **Lil has booked the park for August 3rd (first Saturday in August) next year** — a full park with a pavilion, amenities, and barbecue capability.
- Ongoing/recurring events include: **Annual Fishing Tournament**, Ring of Fire, boat parades, and lake cleanup day. Mott's continue to host the Meet and Greet for kids and families.
- A **boat parade** was held this year for the first time in many years and although attendance was light – it was a fun event.

C. Emergency Services / First Aid

(Reported by Molly)

- Eastern Broome EMT came to the lake and provided **fire safety and first aid training** — well-received.
- **CPR training** is available: ~3 hours, approximately \$17/person; EMT is willing to come to the lake.
- A spring session can be arranged if folks are interested.

D. Water Quality

(Presented by Leo Race, with data compiled by brother Dave Race)

Six graphs were presented covering data from 1985 through 2024, compiled by the **Upstate Freshwater Institute** (senior scientist: Dr. Dave Matthews, PhD, environmental science). Key findings:

- **Water Clarity (Secchi Disk):** Average depth ~7.5 meters in the last two years. First reading in June 2025 was 9 meters (approx. 27 feet); July reading was 6.5 meters. Clarity is **trending upward** (improving), though some natural seasonal variation exists.

- **Chlorophyll-A (Algae Productivity):** Trending upward — more nutrients in the water, which feeds algae. A concern for future HABs (Harmful Algal Blooms).
- **HABs:** There was **no major bloom in 2025** — only small occurrences on the west and south sides. This is a positive development compared to recent years.
- **Phosphorus (Surface & Deep):** Trending **downward**, which is problematic because phosphorus is a limiting factor for algae growth. Less phosphorus means more favorable conditions for algae growth when it does occur.
- **Nitrogen:** Also trending **downward** — same concern as phosphorus.
- **pH:** Healthy at 7.5 — good for drinking water and recreational use.
- **Historical context:** Chlorophyll-A data from the 1980s–90s shows the "pea soup" algae conditions that existed before the sewer system was installed. The sewer system's positive impact is clearly visible in the data. However, recent trends are moving back in the wrong direction.
- **Key conclusion:** Dr. Matthews has determined that **wastewater is the source of approximately 80% of phosphorus** in similar lake systems. The need for a modernized sewer system is well-supported by this data.
- The presenters expressed appreciation to **Mark Hillspaugh** (board president and environmental engineer) for his extensive volunteer efforts..

E. Fishing

(Reported by the Fishing Committee; Andrew also contributed)

- Annual stocking budget remains **\$2,000 for trout**, switching to **50/50 brown trout and rainbow trout**.
- **Golden trout** were added (5 fish) this year — not previously on the permit; a photo was posted of one caught.
- **No perch or additional fish stocking in 2025** due to the planned lake lowering and uncertainty about its impact on fish populations.
- **Perch Pot:** A privately funded, donation-based fund currently at **approximately \$1,800**. Purpose is to supplement the fishery (perch were stocked two years ago and populations are rebuilding). Donations accepted.
- **Crayfish** are being considered as a future stocking option — included in the updated permit. Decision deferred while studies are reviewed and community input gathered.
- **Fish habitat structures:** Exploring dropping dead/dying trees (with cinder blocks) into deeper water (20–30 feet) to create fish habitat. This is a known technique used by government agencies. DEC permission will be sought. Trees with disease (e.g., pine-killing algae/fungus) are a candidate. No action yet.
- **Bait fish:** Investigated but prohibited by DEC for species like thread fins used in reservoirs. Some minnow species could work but introducing new species carries ecological risk.
- **Annual Fishing Tournament:** Very limited participation in 2025 (only two children of the organizer and one other participant). Noted as being properly advertised via website and Facebook. Encouraged community to put it on their calendars for next year.

- **Fishing licenses:** Required for all anglers 16 and older, even on this private lake. Brown and rainbow trout can now be kept year-round (change made last year). Lake trout are stunted in Oquaga Lake and efforts to get a keep limit were declined by DEC.

F. Membership

- **Lil** serves as an informal welcome ambassador — when notified of new lake residents, she delivers Association mugs and information packets.
- Members encouraged to flag any new arrivals to Lil.

G. Boating Safety

- This committee **needs a champion** — a dedicated advocate like the late Mart Levy who proactively enforced safety.
- **Notable 2025 safety incident:** A boat was observed going the **wrong direction on the 4th of July weekend** — described as "absolutely scary."
- A tubing boat was observed operating **without a spotter** this year.
- **NYS Boating Certificate:** Now required for ALL boat operators at the helm — the 5-year grandfather period has elapsed. Having a certificate holder elsewhere on the boat is not sufficient. The Association has no enforcement powers, but insurance companies and law enforcement will be concerned in the event of an accident.
- Out-of-state certificates (e.g., National Boating Association, Coast Guard Auxiliary) are accepted. Captains' licenses qualify but can expire.

H. History Committee

- Previously compiled extensive history, deeds, photographs of every property around the lake under **Helen Crowley** and **Ginger McGinnis** — not updated since.
- Members with photographs, journals, or home movies (even from 100+ years ago) are encouraged to share.
- Gary gave a related presentation at the Historical Society the prior week.

I. Newsletter / Website

(Reported by Chris)

- A **weekly Monday email** is sent with a summary of lake news, calendar events, photos, and news articles.
- Approximately **60–65 of ~95 lake residents are registered** on the website; ~30 are not yet registered.
- Members are urged to encourage unregistered neighbors to sign up — it enables the Association to communicate effectively (dues notices, alerts, lost pets, etc.).
- Members can submit article topics via a link on the website; the communications team will follow up.

J. Sewer Committee

(See also Old Business — Sewer System, below)

- A **joint committee** with the Town of Sanford — the Sewer District is an extension of town government.
 - **Scott Conklin** manages maintenance for Town of Sanford. Association representatives on the committee: **Mark Millspaugh, Barbara Marco, and Jamie Szenher.**
 - Anyone wishing to join the committee should see Mark.
 - Sewer District has its own annual budget meeting each fall; postcards mailed to property owners with notice.
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4. Old Business

A. Lake Lowering

- The **outlet gate will be opened on the Monday after Columbus Weekend** (approximately October 20th).
- The lake will drop gradually — likely taking about **a week** to reach a useful level due to silt buildup in front of the spillway.
- **Dredging** will be conducted concurrently (see below).

B. Dredging the Outlet

- A **permit has been applied for with the DEC** to dredge the area in front of the lower gate, extending approximately **30–40 feet out** and removing **18–24 inches (possibly more)** of accumulated silt and sediment.
- Purpose: ensure the lower gate can be fully closed after lowering.
- **Last dredged:** Estimated 15–20 years ago (during prior gate replacement and welding work).
- **Contractor:** Wist at **Dansville Dirt Works** has provided a quote:
 - ~\$500 for materials (erosion control, silt fencing)
 - **\$2,000/day for two machines** (described as "extraordinarily low")
 - Quoted on **time and materials** basis; number of days unknown
 - Quote does **not** include analytical testing or off-site hauling of material
- **DEC has been asked to waive analytical testing** requirements; decision pending. If required, testing could cost \$1,000–\$2,000.
- **Material management plan:** Hope to dewater the material on-site behind silt fencing, then use it to fill low spots around the dam embankment. However, dredged silt is very wet and may require a watertight container if hauled by truck.
- **Worst-case cost scenario:** If material must go to a landfill, tipping fees could range from \$30–\$80/ton depending on classification (daily cover vs. waste).
- **Frequency:** Expected to be needed roughly every 15–20 years.
- **Reminder to all property owners:** Avoid dumping yard waste in roadside ditches — it flows into the lake. Power washing and sweeping also contribute to sediment load.

C. Sewer System Replacement

- The existing system is **over 40 years old** and beyond its useful life. Built on a low-bid basis; septic tanks and pump chambers are deteriorating and leaking in both directions (groundwater infiltration; effluent leakage toward the lake).
- **Engineering Assessment** commissioned by the Town several years ago found:
 - The **wastewater treatment plant and infrastructure are still sound** (building, pumps, pipes)
 - **Sand filter media will need replacement** eventually
 - **Gravity sewers** were videoed and found to be in good condition
 - Septic and effluent pump tanks are in rough shape; each replacement costs approximately **\$15,000**
- **State-of-the-art alternative: Grinder Pumps**
 - Compact, leakproof high-density polyethylene chambers
 - Grind waste into fine slurry, pump through low-pressure sewers
 - Everything is on rails — if a pump fails, it slides out and a new one slides in (much safer than current system requiring confined space entry)
 - Would eliminate tanks full of waste near the shoreline — all waste goes directly to the treatment plant
 - Treatment plant is **outside the lake basin**, closer to Pennsylvania
- **Funding:**
 - Town has applied under **two different state funding programs** (scoring-based allocation; applications submitted)
 - A second application deadline is coming up; the town will vote at their next meeting
 - If successful, expect ~1 year of engineering design, then government review, before going out to bid — **minimum 2+ year timeline**
- **Hybrid approach proposed:** Use conventional financing (municipal bonds) to begin replacing failing systems with grinder pumps immediately, while awaiting grant funding for a full system replacement
 - Requires adding **concrete settling basins** at the treatment plant first
 - Each new failure or new construction would then get a grinder pump
- **Scott's property development:** Future development there has rights to sewer service; the District must accommodate them. Currently no flow contribution since the property is undeveloped, which may allow a hybrid project to begin at lower capacity.
- The sewer committee and town meetings are the venue for ongoing discussion; community engagement strongly encouraged.

D. Ice Eaters

- The Town introduced a proposed **ice eater law** at the July town meeting.
- Comments were received; Town Supervisor Kenny West indicates it will be **reintroduced with modifications at the September meeting** (or October if needed).
- The law primarily addresses **notification, public safety**, and limiting ice opening to what is necessary. It shifts emphasis from turbine-type fans to **bubbler systems**.

- **Practical reminder:** One ice eater was observed still running in May with its thermostat set to 80°F. Thermostats should be set to **just above freezing** so the unit only operates when ice is actually forming.

E. Short-Term Rentals

- No formal Association position has been staked out yet.
 - Concerns raised:
 - Renters may not be informed of lake rules (e.g., direction of travel, boating safety)
 - Property owners may be unreachable during emergencies
 - Fire/life safety compliance (cited a fatal case in the Town adjacent to Poughkeepsie involving an Airbnb with falsely advertised smoke alarms; property owners charged with manslaughter)
 - Overcrowding (one Oquaga Lake property noted to have 1 bathroom and 14 beds)
 - Inadequate parking; waste/sanitation issues
 - **NYS has adopted a short-term rental law** requiring registration; counties are to be collectors of that data beginning January 1st unless the county opts out. Some counties are exploring local registration programs and bed tax collection.
 - Likely that the Association will develop a recommendation for the Town over the next one or two meetings; this would go first to the Planning Board, then to the Town Board.
 - There is reportedly still an **opening on the Planning Board** — community members are encouraged to apply.
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5. New Business

A. Bylaw Amendment — Notification Method

Proposed change: Replace US Mail notification requirements with notification via the **Association website and email** for:

- Annual meeting notice (Article 8, Section 1) — at least 10 days prior
- Special meetings (Article 8, Section 2) — at least 10 days prior
- All formal notices to members (Article 10)

The amended language substitutes "mailed" with "posted on the Association website and emailed to each member at their current email address on file; such emailing shall be considered presumptive evidence of service."

Motion to amend bylaws as read: Seconded. Passed.

B. Donations

- **Eastern Broome Emergency Services (EMT):** Donation authorized at the same level as prior year (amount not specified in the recording — referenced as "already on" the treasurer's report).
- **Deposit Food Pantry / Food Kitchen:** \$400 donation authorized (contact had not returned a call before the meeting; board used last year's amount as reference).

Motion to authorize both donations: Passed.

C. Ring of Fire — Flares vs. LED Lights

- The Association has an inventory of approximately **600 road flares** remaining, which are **past their expiration date** (cannot be donated to retail or emergency services).
- **LED road hazard lights** were posted on the website as an alternative — reusable, smoke-free, no wax residue, available on Amazon, some rechargeable.
- Discussion on options: continue using flares until exhausted, hold a "fire sale," or transition to LEDs.
- No formal board action taken. General guidance: **keep flares at least 5 feet back from the water** to reduce ash and residue entering the lake.
- Members noted concern about fireworks residue on the lake surface on the morning after the 4th of July. Noted (with some levity) that consumer fireworks are technically illegal in New York State. No formal action; no Association endorsement of their use.

D. Scott's Property — Dock Debris

- The former Scott's property has **old docks remaining in the water** that will break apart over winter.
- A member (Dave) raised the issue and offered to contact the groundskeeper/caretaker (Joe) to request removal during the lake lowering.
- Mark noted he had raised it at town meetings previously; agreed the lake lowering is the right time to act.

E. Unpaid Dues Follow-Up

- A renewed notice was sent approximately 10 days ago to delinquent members, with a description of what dues fund (dredging, dam maintenance, etc.).
- 4 payments received since that notice.
- The board will continue follow-up.

F. Beaver Activity

- A beaver was observed in June/July but has not been seen recently. Two beavers were reported.
- Significant tree damage noted along shoreline in previously unaffected areas.
- The process for beaver removal: locate the beaver, get permission from the property owner to set traps, understand that traps pose a risk to dogs and children. **Beavers cannot**

be relocated — they must be killed. Trappers may be engaged; pelt value is minimal (~\$5–\$25).

- No formal action taken; situation being monitored.
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6. Election of Board Members

Four sitting board members whose terms expired were up for re-election: **Leo Race, Gary Holdredge, Dave Paparoski, and Chris Mowry** — all expressed willingness to continue.

One **vacancy** to fill due to the departure of **Koen Gieskes**, who is moving back to the Netherlands. Koen has served on the board for many years, his leadership and contributions over the years have been significant and much appreciated.

Jamie Szenher was nominated to fill the vacancy, recognized for her involvement with the Sewer Committee.

Slate: Leo Race, Gary Holbridge, Dave Poski, Chris Mowry, and Jamie Szenher.

Motion to approve the slate: Seconded. Passed unanimously.

8. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn: Seconded. Passed.

Immediately following, a brief **board reorganization meeting** was held:

- **Mark** — continues as President
- **Gary** — continues as Vice President
- **Marie** — continues as Treasurer
- **Chris** – continues as Secretary

Motion to approve officers: Passed unanimously.