

Cleaner and safer water sought for Rhodell

By Matthew Hill

REGISTER-HERALD REPORTER

Ideas and expertise were in abundance at the Rhodell Volunteer Fire Department this week.

What was lacking received the most attention: money.

The Upper Guyandotte Watershed Association sponsored the community meeting Tuesday night to discuss how to make Rhodell's water supply cleaner and safer.

"The goals for our meeting were to bring people from the community together with our panel of experts and raise awareness of the issues involved," said Kelly Jo Drey, VISTA volunteer for the UGWA.

"We also wanted to get all of our options out there for consideration. I think the meeting was a success. There was a positive response to the ideas presented. We want to empower the community to take action on these issues."

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Rhodell has its share of water problems, but the primary concern discussed at the meeting was the entry of raw sewage into the water supply. To clean up the water supply is to encourage development of infrastructure and jobs, ac-

ording to Andrew Lake of Small Flows Clearinghouse, which works in conjunction with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

"The only way you're going to get infrastructure here is to have clean water."

Mark Ehrnschwender, spokesman for Plateau Action Network, told of his experiences in planning and developing water treatment solutions for small, rural communities in Fayette County and elsewhere.

"What you want is a community-based solution," he said. "Partnerships, management and education are very important."

Potential solutions ranged from package plants, which service as few as two homes, to a more centralized treatment center for an entire watershed, such as Upper Guyandotte.

"We did house-to-house surveys in Winona to study septic tanks," Ehrnschwender said when asked whether the current problem involved septic tanks leaking. "It's not that septic tanks are leaking. They're not there."

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One thing all the experts could agree on is the need for funding. Cliff Pannell of the West Virginia Rural Community Assistance Program said you must have

"buy-in" from the residents to have a successful plan.

"Package plants can be expensive. They require chemicals, electricity, etc.," he said.

Norm Kirkham of the Region 1 Planning and Development Council shed light on the need for money and management. "Management is crucial. If we do this, the days of free sewer are over. We have to find a feasible plan and work through the proper government bodies. I mean, we could clean up this creek tomorrow, but we have to find a feasible way to do it," he explained.

"Be careful what you wish for," Kirkham cautioned.

"There are a lot of ifs in the grant/loan process," Ehrnschwender said. "We will always have more need than money."

Ehrnschwender said the plan is not to replace septic tanks. Rather, a governmental regulatory agency would take responsibility for regulating, cleaning and maintaining them for a monthly user fee. "The fee would probably range between \$15 and \$20 per month," he said.

For those who are interested in getting involved, Drey said to call Upper Guyandotte Watershed Association at 294-6188.

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