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What Do We Do Now? Five Phases of Community Process

To implement a community process that will be able to move the project to completion, the community team must work with the entire community, *including the naysayers* and those who have the legal authority to make official community decisions. As can be imagined, there can be many barriers to face and hurdles to overcome throughout the process. Luckily, there are also many things that can be done to make the process move more smoothly.

Every community would naturally like to skip all of the struggle and go right to the solution. It doesn't work that way! It is the *struggle* that stimulates the people in the community to learn, to understand and negotiate their differences, and to come to a conclusion that everyone can live with. Some people say that if a decision is made that no one is completely happy with, it must be the right one!

In the context of a community wastewater decision, the solution chosen could be that wastewater is adequately treated at a reasonable cost and it accommodates the plans of the community into the future. To accomplish a task of this proportion, it usually takes three groups of citizens with different levels of involvement:

- Steering committee (5-10 people) with deep commitment;
- Action teams, with special interests and skills; and
- Informed citizens, including all residents.

The entire process from start to finish breaks into five distinct phases:

- Phase 1 — Understanding the Situation
- Phase 2 — Exploring the Options
- Phase 3 — Making Informed Decisions
- Phase 4 — Implementing Decisions
- Phase 5 — Managing the System

The following outline provides the detail to each of the phases. It suggests the potential answers to the questions *what, when, who, and how*, but your community must provide the community-specific answers.

Phase I: Understanding the Situation: Defining the Problem, Collecting and Interpreting Community Information

Often a community first becomes aware of a wastewater or water system problem because of a violation, inability to transfer a property title, wastewater surfacing, a contaminated well or a green lake. When one or more homeowners becomes concerned about such a problem, they must help the rest of the community understand the situation and define the problem.

The typical timeline for this phase is 6 to 12 months.