

# A joint stormwater utility?

By **MICHELLE MONROE**  
Messenger Staff Writer

**S**T. ALBANS — Both St. Albans City and Town could benefit from combining their existing stormwater programs and expanding them to found a joint water stormwater utility, according to a study commissioned by the Northwest Regional Planning Commission (NRPC).

Both communities face a potential increase in stormwater regulation, as well as permitting challenges that can hinder development, according to the authors of the study, Juli Beth Hinds of VHB Pioneer and Wayne Elliott, of

## St. Albanses may benefit with cooperation

Forcier Aldrich and Associates.

Existing programs, the consultants found, are minimal in both communities and would not be sufficient to meet anticipated federal requirements, particularly the Environmental Protection Agency's Municipal Separate Storm System (MS4), which applies to communities above a certain population density. It is likely St. Albans City and portions of the town will fall under the program following the 2010 census.

In addition, both communities have expired stormwater permits,

which can cloud a title and prevent property sales, as well as difficulties in getting stormwater permits for new development because the two communities are part of an impaired watershed with two impaired waterways — Stevens and Rugg Brooks.

A joint utility would allow the two communities to save money by sharing resources and increasing efficiencies, the authors pointed out. However, they also provided a model for each community creating its own stormwater manage-

► *STORMWATER page 5A*

*continued from page 1*

ment program.

Communities in Vermont may legally charge a fee for stormwater services, even non-profits and properties owned by the state or federal governments must pay the fee, just as they are required to pay for water and sewer services. Currently, all stormwater activities are funded through property taxes not paid by such entities as Northwestern Medical Center or the courthouses, even though they have an impact on stormwater.

St. Albans Town spends about \$115,000 on stormwater-related work within its public works department, primarily ditch and culvert maintenance. The town also rents a street sweeper each year and as well as equipment for cleaning stormwater basins.

St. Albans City spends \$80,000 per year on street sweeping, basin cleaning and other stormwater-related maintenance.

In addition, since 2003 more than \$1.5 million has been spend on stormwater mitigation in St. Albans Town and City. Much of the funding has come from grants with a \$297,000 EPA grant received by NRPC in 2005 often serving as a source for matching funds.

The Center for Clean

and Clear has also provided matching funds for grants.

However, the study's authors point out, the NRPC's grant is now gone and the two communities will need to consider where they will get matching funds for stormwater mitigation work.

A monthly fee of \$4 for each residential homeowner, with commercial fees extrapolated from the household rate, would allow the two communities to raise more than \$400,000 annually. That money would cover a 20-hour-per week stormwater supervisor, who would oversee all stormwater related activities and serve as a point person for stormwater permitting, as well as two part-time staff to do stormwater maintenance. Stormwater-related maintenance would no longer be part of the budgets of the municipalities and would no longer be paid for with tax revenue. The one exception would be the maintenance of dirt roads in the town.

Payments on loans for equipment used in stormwater maintenance, such as the city's street sweeper, would be transferred to the utility and would no longer be paid by taxes.

Stormwater staff could also

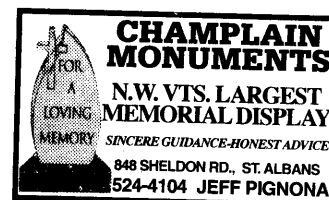
hold other duties in the two communities but their stormwater-related work would be paid for by the utility.

The budget proposed by the study's authors, also includes \$200,000 in capital funds to be used to leverage grant funds for stormwater mitigation projects.

Also included is budgeting for the first year of MS4 program, should the two communities fall under the program.

MS4 municipal permits require the municipalities to show they are engaged in public outreach and are seeking public participation in stormwater issues. The municipalities must have a plan for identifying and eliminating illegal discharges into storm sewers, an effective program for preventing erosion from construction sites, and a program to limit post-construction stormwater discharges.

The municipality must also show that it works to prevent stormwater pollution through maintenance activities such as street sweeping and basin cleaning, and reduced use of pesticides and street salt.



**CHAMPLAIN MONUMENTS**  
N.W. VTS. LARGEST MEMORIAL DISPLAY  
SINCERE GUIDANCE-HONEST ADVICE  
848 SHELDON RD., ST. ALBANS  
524-4104 JEFF PIGNONA