

Hello, my name is Joe Brooks.

I grew up here in Springdale and graduated from Springdale High School in 1973. My family has been involved in business and the community forever. Springdale is a town we love. I am a cousin of Jason Steele. We are grandsons of the late Joe M. Steele.

In November 2018, my Aunt and my Cousin, Charlotte and Jason Steele asked me to look into an issue involving Bethel Heights sewage running onto their property and into their ponds. Three of their cows had been found dead around one of the ponds the city had been using for a sewage dump.

As we began to investigate the problem it seemed to get worse by the day. We found records dating back for 13 years showing site failure, and State inspections showing gross violations with little or no follow up. We found records of city officials discussing the illegal dumping of sewage just like it was everyday business-as-usual. We discovered failures by state regulators to identify engineering mistakes that gave the city's sewage sites over seven times more capacity than they should have been granted. If you want to see the whole gory history, go to "Clean up Bethel Heights.org."

We worked for several months with state regulators showing them documents, pictures, and analytical test results of sewage runoff from surrounding property. In July 2019, the Arkansas Department of Environmental Quality had seen enough and pulled a surprise inspection of the Bethel Heights wastewater facilities. The state took samples of treated wastewater and found the fecal bacteria levels to be "too numerous to count." The state was so shocked, that it responded by demanding laboratory records for monthly tests Bethel Heights had completed for a period of several years. Those records exposed the corruption of city officials in a far-reaching scheme to falsify data in monthly monitoring reports and hide permit failures from the state.

The state issued Bethel Heights a Notice of Violation in August 2019. Subsequently, the city and the state entered into a Consent Administrative Order in October 2019. The city admitted to all the illegal actions the state had accused them of and agreed to haul away sufficient sewage from its wastewater sites to prevent wastewater from surfacing on site and running onto surrounding property.

The agreement has now been in place for over four months. During that time, the city has never complied with the hauling requirements and many of the other requirements in the Consent Administrative Order. During that time, the city has continued to dump sewage on its neighbors with complete disregard. So far, the state appears to not know what to do.

During this process, I have had the opportunity to meet and get to know the neighbors, Lawrence and Joetta Bowen, and Kevin and Tina Bowen. Lawrence and Joetta Bowen have lived in their home on Apple Blossom for over 43 years. They have had to endure Bethel Heights dumping sewage on them for over a decade. Their concerns and complaints had gone unanswered until recently. The smell in their back yard is often unbearable. Samples of sewage runoff taken their yards last week showed fecal coliform levels of 242,000 MPN per 100 ml. Most swimming facilities are closed when the bacteria levels reach 100 MPN per 100 ml. Conditions in the

Bowen's yard are extremely hazardous. The Bowen's have to avoid walking in much of their yard due to the sewage. And, they can not allow their grandchildren to go outside alone due to the pervasive presence of toxic raw sewage.

Bethel Heights officials are so devious, that right after a recent inspection of the Oak Street wastewater site and while DEQ was still inspecting the Lincoln Street wastewater site, the city began a sewage dump at the Oak Street Site. The inspectors had already inspected the Oak Street site, so city officials were confident that they would not be back, and started the sewage dump at Oak Street while DEQ inspectors were still present at Lincoln Street.

A member of our team caught the city illegally dumping sewage at the Oak Street site on Thursday, February 27, 2020 while inspectors were still engaged at the Lincoln Street site. We notified DEQ headquarters that evening and the next day with pictures. I took samples of the runoff and pictures of the illegal dumping. While I was onsite at Forest Bowen Park, which is also the Oak Street sewer site, I was approached by a Bethel Heights police officer who told me that I could not go onto the public park again or he would ticket me for trespass. Out of all the people in the whole world, I alone would be charged with trespass if I went to the park again.

The following Sunday night, while Lawrence and Joetta Bowen were at church, Bethel Heights dumped thousands of gallons of untreated sewage into the Bowen's yard in apparent retribution for us notifying DEQ of the city's sewage dump on the previous Thursday at Oak Street. The weather forecast for that Sunday night had been for rain, but it did not rain. Monday morning came and we were able to take numerous pictures of the sewage piled up in the Bowen's yards. In addition, we took samples showing the sewage was raw and untreated with a fecal coliform count of 242,000 MPN per 100 ml. All information regarding the sewage dump was provided to the state.

The following Tuesday was election day. The Bowen's were going to the polls at the Moose Lodge when they were confronted by the Bethel Heights wastewater operator who taunted them by giving them the middle finger gesture. They believe that they are untouchable.

How would you feel if this were your family – your grandparents?

It is up to the citizens to put a stop to the corruption and rot in Bethel Heights city government. Vote to consolidate Bethel Heights and Springdale.