



Southold Needs to 'Think Through' Proposed Greenport Sewer Expansion, Establish Standards: Supervisor

The Southold town board discussed a proposal to expand Greenport's sewer system at Tuesday's town board work session.



North Fork, NY

By LISA FINN (Patch Staff) - May 18, 2016 1:46 pm ET

NORTH FORK, NY - The Southold Town board discussed a plan proposed by Greenport Village trustees [to expand the village sewer system](#) Tuesday — and said the time was not right, yet, for a decision.

Last week, with an eye toward improving water quality and nitrogen reduction, Greenport Village Trustee Jack Martilotta came before the Southold Town Democratic Committee to discuss a plan to expand the village's sewer system.

According to Martilotta, currently, Greenport's sewer plant handles .6 million gallons per day and runs at approximately half capacity, with 50 percent still available. The approximately 12.5 miles of pipes cover around 900 homes, which are not reliant on traditional, aging septic systems.

Effluent is treated twice before it's sent out into the Long Island Sound, he said. The goal would be to expand the sewer system to include dense populations of homes that sit within 10 feet of the water and currently send nitrogen into the waterways at a rapid rate, Martilotta said.

Martilotta said while the idea is one he and Trustee Doug Roberts would like to pursue — Roberts was unable to attend the meeting — the plan is expensive.

As for potential sewer expansion areas, he mentioned a number of residential buildings in the south of Greenport, plus the large former Lewis Marine building, as well as two sections of the village to the east, and a final piece, that would include Stirling Harbor and Brewer Yacht Yard, as well as homes on Sandy Point, where septic systems can be seen out in the bay after a windy storm. Altogether, about 200 homes would be brought hooked up to village sewers under the proposed expansion, Martilotta said.

"We feel we'd have a very positive impact on water quality," Martilotta said. "We're looking to go beyond our borders to clean up water."

While a lot of oystering takes place in Greenport, Martilotta said pathogen levels in Stirling Harbor are too high to allow for such endeavors. "The way you mitigate that is with a sewer system."

In order to consider the large capital project, which would cost approximately \$6 million, a regional approach would be needed, Martilotta said.

Martilotta said a suggestion has been made to designate up to 20 percent of Community Preservation Funds for water quality improvement; residents across the East End would need to vote upon in a public referendum this November.

Town board reaction

On Tuesday, Southold Town Councilman Jim Dinizio said he'd met with village trustees, at their request; he said while he likes the idea of keeping dialogue open, he's not sure the town can force residents to hook up to the sewer system.

Southold Town Supervisor Scott Russell said the village does not have a sewer study in place, although they have engineering plans and cost estimates.

Southold Town Engineer Michael Collins said while the trustees maintain Stirling Harbor is impaired under a Department of Environmental Conservation designation, "We have already proven that the designation is wrong," he said. The DEC, Collins has said at past meetings, has left water bodies labeled as impaired simply because they don't have the manpower to send out representatives to test them.

Russell said while the trustees believe expanding the sewer district is the best idea, he's not so sure. The cost to expand the sewer district, at approximately \$6 million, is more than it would cost to take the 200 homes and install new, cutting edge wastewater treatment systems at approximately \$10,000 each.

Collins also said to install sewers would mean water being released into the Sound, and not recharging.

Russell agreed, adding that Nassau County draws water from the ground and puts it into the Atlantic, and then wonders why they have water issues. Recharging is critical, he said.

Establishing standards

Russell also said much thought must be given to what the environment stands to gain from allocating CPF funds toward water quality issues.

"People are looking to tap into resources we haven't approved yet," he said. "We need to establish standards and evaluate projects. This project may have merit but how do we know yet?" Also, he said, "This notion of Greenport not getting its fair share of the CPF is a little bit specious," considering the amount spent on Pipe's Cove preservation. Fisher's Island, he said, also has a sewer district. "All of this needs to be evaluated thoughtfully and thoroughly and we need science behind this."

Dinizio said if you look at a map of Greenport, it's one of the most preserved areas, including Moores Woods.

Russell added that the CPF monies are not a new revenue source. "It's giving us the ability to divert some money away from land

preservation toward water quality. I'm not saying we shouldn't do it, but it's not what one person referred to as free money. There's no such thing."

The town, he said, is expecting approximately \$6 million in CPF revenue this year, with projects pending that far exceed that number.

Councilman Bob Ghosio agreed that whether the project is viable or needed is "irrelevant" at this point, until discussions have been had and numbers calculated.

Collins said if the money is going to be diverted, what needs to be determined is "where to get the biggest bang for the buck. We're not there yet."

Dinizio added he'd seen a nitrogen map of Greenport waterways and said nitrogen is not a major issue for the village since it's sewerred.

Russell said there'd been a wish for some time to see Sandy Beach sewerred and perhaps the focus in that area should be on alternative treatment solutions and offsetting some of those costs; the alternative might be more compelling because nothing would be discharged into area waterways, he said. "There are a lot of moving parts here."

The board agreed a great deal of discussion was needed.

Russell said priorities and standards needed to be established and would not be, by the November referendum. But, he said, the town has the ability to establish projects by law after November, just as they do now, with preservation efforts.

Russell said Greenport Village Mayor George Hubbard had reached out to him and said "in no uncertain terms" that Martilotta and Roberts had spoken for themselves.

As for next steps, Russell told Patch after the meeting, "The sewer expansion should be thoroughly evaluated after the town establishes priorities and goals. It should be measured against those goals. It is far too early to make a commitment to a project of any type with so many unanswered questions. This is particularly true when money doesn't exist yet. Councilmen Ghosio and Dinizio have been authorized by the town board to discuss matters of mutual interest with trustees of the village. This is one of many topics that have been discussed and will continue to be part of that agenda."

At Tuesday's town board meeting, Kevin McAllister of Defend H2O also spoke and said any future use of CPF monies for water quality efforts required a "planning process." Standards needed to be adopted, he said, with metrics and measurables. "You're going to have to enact local laws with more stringent standards for discharge," he said. "Particularly in the area of new development."

The plan would require good framework, thorough vetting by professionals and local laws to "raise the bar," he said.

Russell agreed that thoughtful, deliberate discussions were needed to establish priorities and standards. He said the board would wait for legislation until after the summer, when the county plans to roll out its new alternative wastewater treatment systems.

"Kevin Mc Allister spoke to make sure that, if the CPF fund extension is approved, we should be very careful and thoughtful with any subsequent funds. He doesn't want to see us, or any town, rush into decision-making without thinking it through. That's a sentiment the board agrees with and it's exactly how we intend on moving forward," Russell said.