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Let's Save the Bay

Town of Huntington, Northport, Asharoken villages sign intermunicipal agreement to work together for waterway

By David Ambro October 2, 2014

Before the leaders of the three municipalities on Northport Bay put pen to paper at a Huntington Town Hall ceremony to sign a historic intermunicipal agreement Monday, September 29, Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, was called upon to sum up the moment.

“This is the way we’re going to save the environment,” she said. “We need everyone at the table working with one voice and working together.”

Ms. Esposito said the future of the environmental movement is by groups, that have in the past been divided, to unite behind common causes, such as preservation and protection of water quality in Northport Bay complex.

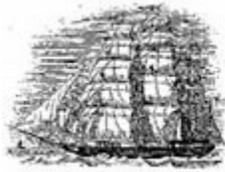
At town hall Monday, Huntington Town Supervisor Frank Petrone, Northport Village Mayor George Doll and Asharoken Village Mayor Gregory Letica signed a 10-page intermunicipal agreement outlining the terms under which the three municipalities will work cooperatively to improve water quality in Northport Bay and its adjacent harbors and tributaries.

“This would not have happened if not for the ingenuity of the municipalities and the hard work of Adrienne Esposito,” Mr. Petrone said.

Supervisor Petrone said the agreement signed Monday is the result of a cooperative effort that began in 2010 with the creation of the Northport Harbor Water Quality Protection Committee. He said the cornerstone of the agreement to formalize the joint effort between the town and villages is the creation of a six-member Northport Harbor Water Quality Protection Committee Inter-Municipal Council, which will consist of the town supervisor, each of the village mayors and a second individual appointed by each of the municipalities.

The agreement defines the area of concern as which is defined to include Northport Bay, Northport Harbor, Price’s Bend, Duck Island Harbor, Duck Island Cove, Carter’s Bight, Steer’s Canal, Centerport Harbor and Centerport Mill Pond together with the contributing watershed area. One of the major objectives of the council will be the creation of a Water Quality Improvement, Protection and Management Plan for the Northport Bay Complex to serve as a blueprint for future management, especially in the areas of water quality, restoration ecology, stormwater management public outreach, public use, public enjoyment and implementation and encouragement of the enactment of coordinated laws governing the control of point source and non-point source pollution.

“The plan will serve as a basis for the development and implementation of uniform codes, rules and regulations. The plan will encourage the regeneration of wetlands and shellfish populations and will serve as a basis for the development of regulations to prevent septic system, cesspool and individual sewage treatment system degradation affecting the Northport Bay Complex,” says the intermunicipal agreement. “When necessary and when funding is available, the municipalities may employ experts needed to assist in the preparation of the management plan.”



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During an interview at town hall Monday, Mayor Doll said the management plan is a fundamental reason why Northport Village has been an active participant in the joint effort. “These are the three municipalities that border on the bay and we would like all of the rules and regulations to be the same,” Mayor Doll said. “There is no sense in one municipality implementing water quality initiatives if the other municipalities are not doing the same thing. This lets us all be on the same page.

Mayor Doll said the joint council will also give the municipalities more leverage in applying for federal, state and county grant money. “The grant providers look favorably on all the municipalities involved applying for grants together,” he said.

“This also gives us a better opportunity to know about and address each others’ concerns,” added Northport Deputy Mayor Henry Tobin, who was at town hall Monday for the agreement signing and a meeting of the joint committee. “As an example, Asharoken has ongoing concern about avoiding erosion and breaches of its beach and Northport has concerns about sustaining a working and recreational harbor.”

Supervisor Petrone congratulated Northport Village for its recent upgrade to its sewer plant. “We bring ourselves together today because we find that various things happen between us in terms of water quality,” he said.

Mayor Letica said Northport Bay is a unique geological coastal feature with lovely wetlands, a variety of shellfish and shorebirds. He said the bay complex is the home to a tern colony in the summer and thousands of ducks in the winter. He said he is happy to sign the intermunicipal agreement and that he is glad the municipalities are coming together to protect the environment in this critical body of water.

According to the document signed Monday, the other goals of the Council are:

- To improve the water quality of the Northport Bay Complex so that all waters will consistently meet water quality standards for health, safety, welfare, environmental, recreational and economic purposes.
- To improve the water quality of the Northport Bay Complex and associated uplands, so that it will meet New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) usage standards for saltwater bodies.
- To protect, restore and enhance the surrounding tidal wetlands that serve to cleanse ecosystems, provide marine food production and wildlife habitat, offer opportunities for education, research and recreation, provide flood and storm control, and offer open space and aesthetic appreciation.
- To control and reduce point and non-point sources of pollution affecting the Northport Bay Complex and its environs.
- To encourage enactment of coordinated local coastal laws to maximize protection, restoration and enhancement efforts to improve the quality of the Northport Bay Complex and its wetlands, including without limitation, the development of uniform laws, rules and regulations for enactment and implementation by the municipalities.



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- To originate, produce and disseminate educational programs designed to inform the general public, local officials, municipal employees, the construction industry and commercial entities about stormwater runoff and illicit discharge issues and other sources of pollution affecting the Northport Bay Complex and to encourage voluntary compliance with the water quality laws, regulations, permits and techniques used to improve water quality.
- To encourage and support scientific research to improve water quality, wetlands and the environment of the Northport Bay Complex.
- To encourage to the fullest extent possible the mutually agreeable goals of the Council with support services of existing staff and of the scientific community located within the area and visitors to the area.
- To work to encourage funding opportunities to support and facilitate goals established in the management plan.
- To work towards encouraging the preparation, development and implementation of and projects to promote: storm water pollution prevention, wetlands and uplands restoration including shellfish and native and non-invasive vegetation, dredging where indicated to improve hydrologic flow and to reduce the presence of pollutants and to participate individually or jointly in the preparation and filing of the MS4 annual report to the DEC to the extent required pursuant to the state permit.

Since its inception in 2010, Mr. Petrone and Ms. Esposito have chaired the Northport Harbor Water Quality Committee. According to Mr. Petrone, the committee released a preliminary report in 2010 with short term and long term objectives, and its efforts have been ongoing.

He said some of the initiatives of the committee have been: dye testing in Centerport and Northport sewer districts for potential leaks in collection systems, Centerport Harbor Dredging to increase tidal flushing, initiated a pilot program for eel grass restoration, approval of a plan to upgrade the Northport sewer treatment plant and waste water collection system to meet federal and state nitrogen standards and work with federal representatives to obtain a grant for Stony Brook University to continue and expand red tide testing.