

# THE EAST HAMPTON STAR

SHINES FOR ALL

## Water Is Hot Topic

By Janis Hewitt | October 8, 2015 - 1:42pm



The panel included, from left, Southampton Town Supervisor Anna Throne-Holst, East Hampton Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell, County Executive Steve Bellone, and Jeremy Samuelson, the executive director of C.C.O.M. *Janis Hewitt*

A panel including Southampton Town Supervisor Anna Throne-Holst, East Hampton Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell, and Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone addressed environmental issues at a standing-room-only forum sponsored by Concerned Citizens of Montauk at the Montauk Firehouse on Sunday.

The discussion was led by Jeremy Samuelson, the executive director of C.C.O.M., who said that when the community preservation fund was established in 1998, it was hoped it would cause a slowdown in building, which would help alleviate wastewater problems. However, he said, the condition has only worsened as a result of faulty septic systems. He was not alone in targeting septic systems as a major culprit of the deterioration of local waterways.

Mara Dias of the Eastern Long Island Chapter of Surfrider Foundation said the foundation, working with the Blue Water Task Force, monitors the waterways monthly. On a graph, she pointed out that nitrogen levels in local waters have risen extensively, especially during the week of Sept. 28 when all areas of Lake Montauk showed high levels caused by fertilizer runoff, as well as bacteria from animal and human feces and other pollutants from septic waste.

failing septic systems,” she said.

Algal blooms have affected ponds townwide more this year than before. Mr. Samuelson said that with 68 percent of Montauk preserved for open space and zoning laws to protect fragile areas, the East End is better off than some other areas but that more needs to be done.

He asked Mr. Bellone, who is running for re-election, how it was possible for the county to monitor the East End when 85 percent of his constituents live in western Suffolk. The county executive answered that he has a regional approach, encourages interaction, advice, and collaboration with communities, and uses specific resources for implementation. “I look at the county and consider what is right for all of it,” he said.

All of the speakers agreed that the East End’s septic systems need to be overhauled. Mr. Cantwell, who is seeking re-election this year, said he would encourage people to monitor their own systems, and added that septic inspections should occur whenever a property is sold. The town, he said, should offer incentives to replace faulty systems, since replacement might not be affordable for everyone, with a funding source created.

To that end, Mr. Cantwell said he hopes the community preservation fund will be reinstated when it expires in 15 years, and he said he would like 20 percent of the fund earmarked for water quality improvement.

Ms. Throne-Holst, who hopes to run against Representative Lee Zeldin next year, said planning required resilience and diversity. She agreed that current septic systems can no longer handle more buildout. She would like a mapping system created that would highlight faulty systems, and an incubator for research and development of new technologies.

Mr. Cantwell agreed that better technology could accelerate the update of the septic systems and help take nitrogen out of the waterways.