

Nassau must pay a share of sewer outfall pipe

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Rob Weltner, president of Freeport-based Operation SPLASH, spoke on Sept. 3, 2015, about the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant, which dumps 50 million gallons of effluent daily into Reynolds Channel in Long Beach. The discharge has led to a decline in area water quality, says Weltner, who supports a plan for an ocean outfall pipe that would release effluent 2 1/2 miles into the Atlantic. (Credit: Newsday / Jessica Rotkiewicz) (Credit: Jessica Rotkiewicz)

Securing funding for an ocean outfall pipe for the Bay Park sewage treatment plant has become a bit of a game. The players are Nassau County and the state, and they're playing chicken. Each is waiting for the other to blink. But in the end, the state might need to play a little good ol' country hardball to get this project going.

Nassau County, understandably, wants to be on the hook for the least amount of money possible -- preferably, none. It already has received more than \$900 million in federal money to rebuild the Sandy-battered plant, a godsend for the cash-strapped county. But Nassau needs to step up on helping to pay for the pipe. Much smaller sewage treatment plants around the state have had to pay for upgrades when out of compliance with clean-water standards. It is utterly fair to expect Nassau, whose years-long noncompliance and defiance have choked Reynolds Channel and the South Shore bays with nitrogen, to do the same.

The state is unwilling to commit any of \$210 million from Washington for storm mitigation to the pipe. Sen. Chuck Schumer, who pushed for the Sandy-related money, wanted it for the pipe. Instead, state officials are talking about taking \$150 million in federal funding intended for a nitrogen-removal system for Bay Park and using it for the pipe. That's not a good option. That system will be needed wherever the pipe empties, including the Atlantic Ocean.

There is a little good news on the price tag. The project's \$540 million estimate was inflated. The actual cost is more like \$450 million, a figure that should be confirmed in a new engineering report due soon.

We have supported payment from multiple sources, and we still do. But Nassau needs to pony up. So does the state. This is a huge project that must get started, and soon. No more games.

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