

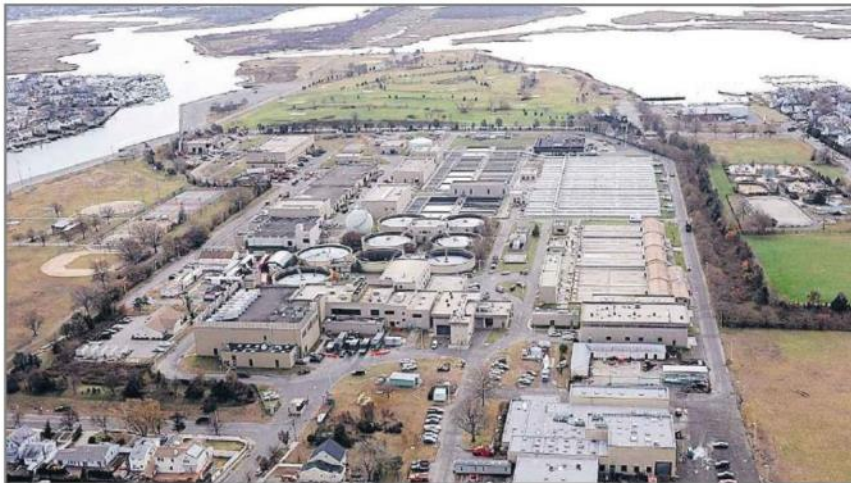
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**CLEAN WATER PROJECTS**

# BIG DOUBTS ON FUNDING



DOUG KUNTZ

**At Sandy-damaged Bay Park sewage plant, hope dims for NY, federal aid**

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Nassau's Bay Park sewage treatment plant in East Rockaway

## BAY PARK SEWAGE PLANT

# Doubts on funds to fight pollution

Little chance for federal or state money for ocean outfall pipe, nitrogen removal

BY JENNIFER BARRIOS  
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The prospects for federal or state money to build an ocean outfall pipe and a nitrogen-removal system for Nassau's storm-damaged Bay Park sewage treatment plant are now in doubt after neither project was included in recent state funding plans.

An expected \$150 million for the nitrogen-removal system, which federal officials announced in May would be included in the state's plans for a third installment of storm-recovery money from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, does not appear in the state's upcoming request to the federal agency.

Also, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo did not include money for the ocean outfall pipe in his proposed state budget last month. He instead vowed to "continue to press the federal



government" to come up with the estimated \$546 million to \$700 million for the project. That leaves Bay Park, which serves more than half a million people, without funding for that project either.

While the idea of building a pipe to send effluent from the

plant into the Atlantic Ocean instead of the nitrogen-choked Western Bays enjoys broad support, state and federal officials for months have pointed to each other as the better source for the funds.

"This promise that it's coming from the federal government is starting to be hollow," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment, one of the groups pushing for the project. "Everyone gives lip service. There's a lot of verbal support, a lot of head-nodding, but no one's coming up with a check."

Bay Park, heavily damaged during superstorm Sandy, will be rebuilt using \$810 million in Federal Emergency Management Agency funds. The state also dedicated \$101 million in storm-recovery money to fixing the plant.

But without the ocean outfall pipe, the plant's average daily



Electrical equipment powering these huge pumps at the Bay Park sewage treatment plant was damaged by a tidal surge during superstorm Sandy.

50 million gallons of treated effluent would still continue to drain into Reynolds Channel.

The high levels of nitrogen in the effluent are harming the area's coastal marshlands, critical for natural defenses against harsh waves and severe flooding during storms like Sandy, according to the state Department of Environmental Conservation.

County officials said plans for the rebuilt plant already have been drawn up to allow for both the ocean outfall pipe and the nitrogen-removal system. Both projects are vital, said Brian Nevin, spokesman for Nassau County Executive Edward Mangano.

Nevin said he would not speculate on what the county





CHARLES ECKERT

would do without the state aid for the nitrogen-removal system. Nassau believed the state had “already committed to provide the funding needed” for it, Nevin said.

Nevin said the county is now in talks with the state over funding for that system.

Jamie Rubin, director of Cuomo’s Office of Storm Recovery, said in a statement that his office “continues to be in discussions with county leaders and the federal government to identify all possible sources of capital to finance the improvement of water quality,” including the nitrogen-removal system.

But while there can be flexibility in the state’s request to HUD for the latest round of Sandy funds, sources said the state felt it was too early to commit to the nitrogen-removal system, especially as only a lesser amount of nitrogen removal would be needed if the ocean outfall pipe was built.

Nitrogen in the effluent

**Everyone gives lip service. There’s a lot of verbal support, a lot of head-nodding, but no one’s coming up with a check.’**

— Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment

would have to be reduced to 8 milligrams per liter with an ocean outfall in place — but it would need to be pushed down to 3 to 5 milligrams per liter if the outfall remained in Reynolds Channel, according to the state DEC.

“Nitrogen pollution from the Bay Park sewage treatment plant is a very serious water quality problem that needs to be addressed immediately,” said Judith Enck, regional administrator for the Environmental Protection Agency. She added that the plant was out of compliance with the Clean Water Act even before Sandy because of levels of nitrogen in the effluent.

In May, Sen. Charles Schumer (D-N.Y.) said the \$150 million for the nitrogen-removal system was part of the negotiations for the third portion of HUD money, “but this is all agreed to and done.”

Schumer declined to comment for this story.

DEC Commissioner Joe Martens, speaking at a joint legislative budget hearing last month, said the state is “going to continue to very aggressively pursue federal funds for the outfall.”

“We think we can make an excellent case for additional federal funds, and we feel we are entitled to additional federal funds for this project,” Mar-

tens said in response to questions at the hearing about Bay Park from Assemb. Todd Kaminsky (D-Long Beach).

Martens promised to seek a meeting with federal officials in Washington on the issue.

But a previous request to FEMA for funds that Martens made in May was denied. FEMA said in a statement last month that its position has not changed.

“The pipe was not damaged during Sandy, and providing a new pipe outfitted for denitrification does not mitigate any hazard over which FEMA has programmatic jurisdiction,” FEMA spokesman Michael Wade said.