



Dougherty pressing for septic upgrades

by [Julie Lane](#)
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JULIE LANE PHOTO | Town Engineer John Cronin has been assigned to attend a conference on septic system upgrades.

The East End Supervisors and Mayors Association (EESMA) is pushing an initiative with county and state officials to approve advanced septic systems for homeowners.

New technology is in place, with 19 homes around the county testing newly designed systems. On Shelter Island, two initiatives for upgrades to septic systems — at the American Legion Hall and at Sylvester Manor — have received financial support.

The town received \$49,500 in a 50-50 matching Suffolk County Water Quality Protection and Restoration Program grant for a new system at the American Legion Hall. Town Engineer John Cronin is making a design to meet the needs there, ranging from light to heavy use depending on activities held at the facility.

On Tuesday, Mr. Cronin represented Mr. Dougherty at the Peconic Estuary Conference at Peconic Estuary Conference at Atlantis Marine in Riverhead, participating on a panel moderated by Assemblyman Fred Thiele Jr. (I-Sag Harbor) to discuss critical issues related to aged septic systems. Others on the panel were town supervisors from East Hampton, Riverhead and Southampton, and Southold town engineer Michael Collins.

On a national level, it's "SepticSmart Week" and the United States Environmental Protection Agency is encouraging states, counties and local municipalities to be proactive informing residents about the importance of having reliable and properly maintained systems to avoid pollution of surrounding waterways.

Shelter Island has been mapping aged systems that may be in need of upgrades and working toward efforts to assist property owners with costs associated with improvements.

Mr. Dougherty pointed out that EESMA, which he chairs, is expected to encourage initiatives in the New York State Legislature to gain funding for a rebate program reimbursing homeowners \$5,000 if they elect to upgrade aged and inefficient systems. Shelter Island pushed for the money in the past year, but the effort failed.

The supervisor said he hopes it would be successful in the next legislative session.

Members of EESMA will meet in closed session on October 28 in Southampton for further discussion and will push for a meeting with the the Suffolk County Department of Health Services to coordinate goals, Mr. Dougherty said.

This is a "sophisticated and competent group" who are capable of championing programs forward in their municipalities once they can resolve issues with the county health department, he added.

What the East End officials are seeking is information on when systems will be available for widespread use; whether they will be mandated by the health department or by individual municipalities and what parameters would trigger upgrades, Mr. Dougherty said.

He and his colleagues are seeking a home rule decision allowing each municipality to set its own guidelines once the technology is approved.

Mr. Dougherty expressed optimism that the message from local officials is being heard in Hauppauge and Albany.

"It's a load off their desks" if East End municipalities are allowed to direct their own programs of upgrades.

"The need is now," Mr. Dougherty said.