



Suffolk's Water Deal

presented by [Peter Kohler](#)

Editorial 7/15/2014

[Watch the Video](#)

Suffolk Executive Steve Bellone certainly picked a pretty spot to bury the hatchet with environmental advocates.

Recently, they gathered by a picturesque pond in Blydenburgh County Park to announce the settlement of contentious litigation that will ultimately require voter approval in a referendum this November.

The agreement settles litigation arguing that Suffolk County improperly diverted funds from a special local sales tax that voters had earmarked to acquire open space, protect drinking water and to hold down sewer taxes.

The deal enables the county to continue borrowing additional funds for three more years from one of these accounts, but the county must repay it. Any such borrowing beyond that would require voter approval.

The referendum would also obligate the county to repay \$29.4 million it diverted in years past, setting it aside for open space and water protection funds.

This all sounds so complicated you have to wonder how voters will ever navigate through the ballot verbiage describing the deal.

But if this referendum is finally put on the ballot, as we hope it is, we would recommend that voters not be distracted by confusing wording, but focus instead upon ending this fuss.

Now, Suffolk needs to focus on the growing nitrogen threat to its rivers, streams and estuaries, which can best be remedied by expanding hugely expensive sewer systems and upgrading septic systems.

For this, the county has to devise new funding strategies and capabilities.

This old environmental stalemate needs to end, so the county can take on these new environmental challenges.