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They have a 'pipe dream'

Rally focuses on additional funding for sewage plant

By [Brian Croce](#)

"Today's the day to save the bay!" "Nitrogen's the reason all the fish are leavin'!" "We have a pipe dream."

These were the chants of environmental leaders and others at a rally outside the county legislative offices in Mineola on Feb. 11, calling on state officials and federal agencies to provide additional funding for improvements to the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant.



Ralliers called on officials to provide more funding for upgrades to the Bay Park Sewage Plant.

"We are at the cusp of turning one of the worst sewage treatment plants in our state into a model plant for the region," said Adrienne Esposito, executive director of Citizens Campaign for the Environment. "Now is the time for action."

More than \$800 million in federal funds have been secured for repairs and upgrades at the plant, but more is needed, according to civic and environmental groups and some elected officials, to pay for extending the plant's outfall pipe. The extended pipe would discharge treated sewage two to three miles out in the Atlantic instead of in Reynolds Channel.

The East Rockaway plant, built in 1949, treats approximately 50 million gallons of sewage per day. It was out of service for two days after Hurricane Sandy, having been hit with a 9-foot tidal surge, and roughly 100 million gallons of untreated sewage flowed into Hewlett Bay and Reynolds Channel. Another 2.2 billion gallons of partially treated sewage was released during the 44 days it took to fully restore operations, according to scientific researchers at Climate Central.



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environmentalists and politicians hope to “revive and restore” the area’s sea life — and those whose jobs depend on it.

Last month, Gov. Andrew Cuomo announced major funding for the plant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and federal community development block grants. The total that has been allocated to repairing and upgrading the plant, Cuomo said, is now \$810 million, but he estimated that extending the outfall pipe would run another \$600 million to \$700 million.

Cuomo, who issued a statement requesting additional funding for the facility from the federal government, said that there is an opportunity to “significantly improve the water quality and resiliency” of the waterways near the

High levels of nitrogen have been found in those waterways, which allow algae to grow unchecked, depleting the water of oxygen and killing off marine life. Extending the pipe, Cuomo said, would also protect marshland from nitrogen-induced damage.

“Reducing nitrogen and extending the outfall pipe is critical for protecting our salt marshes and the backyards of our communities,” said Rob Walsh, president of Operation Stop Polluting Littering And Save Harbors, or SPLASH. “This project will not only revive and restore this massive area’s sea life, but also the economy to which it’s tied.”

Scott Bochner, founder of the Sludge Stoppers Task Force, said that now is the time to upgrade the facility to extend the outfall pipe, which would reduce the nitrogen level in nearby waterways. “To live on Reynolds Channel and not be able to swim in it,” Bochner said, “to watch the marshes crumble, to witness seaweed growing eight feet thick, to view fish and wildlife dying, has been tragic.”

According to Cuomo, engineering designs and bid packages have been prepared for the initial, major components of the plant’s rehabilitation program, including the electrical distribution system and protective perimeter levees. Further efforts are under way to repair 31 major pumps to avoid the recurrence of sewage overflows into residential communities that took place near the plant after Sandy.

Cuomo said he has directed the New York State Environmental Facilities Corporation to work with Nassau County to make interest-free loans available so the county can undertake all repair and resiliency work as soon as possible. The \$810 million in federal funds will be provided as reimbursement for completed projects.

Nassau County Executive Ed Mangano seconded Cuomo’s sentiments on extending the outfall pipe. “We will continue to work with our state and federal officials to make this dream a reality,” he said, “and ensure the long-term health of the Western Bays for future generations.”