

Long Island Regional Planning Council, DEC set hearings on nitrogen contamination

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By Olivia Winslow



Dead bunker fish float at the marina behind the Riverhead Moose Lodge in Riverhead on June 17, 2015. Officials tied this fish kill and others to increased nitrogen in the water, which led to dramatic drops in oxygen levels. Photo Credit: Rande Daddona

The Long Island Regional Planning Council and the state Department of Environmental Conservation will jointly host three public hearings next month on nitrogen contamination of Long Island's waterways as they prepare to embark on a multimillion-dollar study of the issue.

The council has a state grant of nearly \$1.8 million, which will be used to hire outside consultants to help develop a Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan, John Cameron, chairman of the planning council, announced during Wednesday's council meeting. He said the DEC has an additional \$3.2 million to help create the action plan.

Excessive nitrogen in water can fuel algae blooms, result in the killing of fish and adversely affect the Island's groundwater and surface water.

The nitrogen comes from a variety of places — storm runoff, fertilizer use, sewage treatment plants and antiquated septic systems. The nitrogen forms microorganisms that break down in sewage, manures, decaying plants or fertilizers.

"The state wanted the planning council's input," Cameron said. The state is drawing upon a model that utilized the council's predecessor agency — the Long Island Regional Planning Board — in the 1970s and 1980s, which drew up a water and wastewater management system plan, he said.

"The state wanted to utilize that model to manage a similar initiative" to study problems caused by nitrogen in the Island's waterways and devise solutions, Cameron said.

The public hearings are scheduled to be held from 1 to 3 p.m. on all three days: Feb. 1 at the Suffolk County Water Authority Education Center, 260 Motor Pkwy., Hauppauge; Feb. 2 at Suffolk County Community College's Culinary Arts and

Hospitality Center, Multipurpose Room, 20 E. Main St., Riverhead; and Feb. 3, at Hofstra University's Sondra and David S. Mack Student Center, Multipurpose Room East, on the North Campus, Hempstead.

Cameron at this week's meeting also announced the council has received financial commitments to fund its operations from both Nassau and Suffolk counties, at \$250,000 each, which will enable the council to hire a new executive director.

The council has been without an executive director since Cara Longworth resigned last February to become the Long Island regional director of the Empire State Development Corp.

Nassau County has included council operating funds in its approved budget, the county press office confirmed. Funding from Suffolk County comes from the county's Economic Development Corp., said Tony Catapano, the EDC's deputy executive director.

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