

TOP STORIES

Bill aims to save LI watersheds

■ **Lawmaker renews bid** for law against pollution

■ **Previous attempts** were opposed by builders, others

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A state legislator is making another attempt at a bill protecting Long Island watersheds from pollution, but this time without specific limits on nitrogen.

The Long Island Water Quality Control Act, filed yesterday by Assemb. Robert Sweeney

(D-Lindenhurst), is the successor to a measure last year that drew heavy criticism from local officials, and farming and building interests.

The new bill requires the state Department of Environmental Conservation to establish criteria for safeguarding Island watersheds and work to guide farmers on pesticide and fertilizer use that would reduce contamination. It would also create a regional planning board focused on managing water resources.

The legislation also would require nitrogen-removal systems in new developments and mandate that failing cess-

pools be upgraded to cleaner technology, among other measures.

The previous bill called for a new 11-member water-quality commission that would have created regulations limiting pesticide use and would have established standards to limit pollution from wastewater.

The lawmakers backed off that approach after criticism from various groups, saying they would revisit the issue after the passage of the state budget.

Sen. Kenneth LaValle (R-Port Jefferson), who joined with Sweeney on the previous measure, has not yet filed com-

panion legislation to the new bill in the Senate.

LaValle said yesterday that he sent a draft of the bill to various interest groups, and will wait a week to receive feedback from them before filing anything.

"I am really withholding any judgment on this bill until I get the input," he said. "I want a bill to deal with a critically important issue, but not without a process that involves people."

Sweeney announced the new legislation yesterday at a water-quality meeting in Islandia.

"This is a bill that I think we can pass in both houses of the Legislature and have signed

into law," he said. "There is more that needs to be done, but I think we're moving in the right direction."

Sweeney, who announced his retirement last month, said he thought the bill could be passed by the end of this session.

Several stakeholders said it was too early to comment on the new bill.

Mitch Pally, chief executive of the Long Island Builders Institute, said his group was reviewing the measure, as were officials from the Long Island Farm Bureau.

"It's premature to digest it and go through it," said Joe Gergela, Farm Bureau executive director. "We've not changed our position: The farmers are inundated with laws and rules and regulations."

Richard Amper, executive director of the Long Island Pine Barrens Society, said he would have liked to have seen stronger enforcement mechanisms in the bill.

"We think there should be more accountability that ensures that what the legislation intends to do actually gets done," he said.