

New York Legislature Considers Ways to Cut Onsite System Costs

- By David Steinkraus
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Three bills before the New York Legislature could reduce the cost of onsite systems for state residents.

One would remove the requirement that a professional engineer or architect handle the design of an advanced onsite system to reduce nitrogen pollution, as long as the system meets certain guidelines and is on a health department list of approved technologies. This change could cut about \$3,000 of the cost of such installations.

A staff member of The Nature Conservancy on Long Island tells a news reporter that requiring engineer involvement for some onsite systems is like having an engineer certify the installation of a refrigerator. A professional engineer took issue with the idea, noting that advanced systems are essentially miniature wastewater treatment plants with components that need to be chosen by someone with expertise.

The bill was introduced by Rep. Fred Thiele, I-Sag Harbor, and Sen. Kenneth LaValle, R-Port Jefferson. The pair prepared two other bills that also address wastewater issues.

One would allow municipalities to establish septic system replacement loan programs. Property owners could borrow to help pay for the installation of a nitrogen-removing onsite system. The loan would be repaid through a charge on property tax bills.

The other bill would allow communities around the eastern end of Long Island to establish loan programs that draw on their Community Preservation Funds. Loans would be intended to bridge the gap between a septic system replacement rebate and the cost of advanced nitrogen-reducing systems. A 2 percent tax on real-estate transfers bankrolls the funds, which pay for water-protection programs and purchase land for preservation as open space.

“We’re looking for ways to make septic system upgrades more affordable and give an incentive for people to participate in septic system upgrades,” Thiele tells the *Newsday* newspaper.

Although they represent a very wealthy part of the country, communities on the eastern end of Long Island depend heavily on cesspools for wastewater treatment. Water-quality problems have led those communities to recognize the need for better treatment, especially nitrogen reduction. As a result, several communities passed laws requiring advanced onsite systems for new construction or significant remodeling.