

Suffolk legislature approves septic grant program

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The Suffolk County Legislature on Tuesday approved creating a grant program to offset the high costs of low-nitrogen septic systems in new homes.

The measure, which environmental groups worry could incentivize development, was proposed by County Executive Steve Bellone's office. It will use up to \$1.5 million in federal funding to provide grants of up to \$20,000, officials said. Developers could get smaller grants of up to \$10,000 for homes built on previously undeveloped land.

Builders are required to install the high-tech septic systems — which cost double the price of traditional systems — in most new homes and commercial properties, under a law that went into effect in July. That mandate aimed to curb nitrogen pollution that officials have blamed for harmful algal blooms in local waterways.

Legislators were split 12-6 on the one-year grant program, which will retroactively run from July.

Lawmakers who supported the measure said it would help with the Island's housing crisis as well as economic recovery for a construction industry hit hard by the pandemic. They also said county officials have a responsibility to help homeowners who were burdened by a mandate the legislature created.

"At the end of the day it adds up," Minority Leader Kevin McCaffrey (R-Lindenhurst) said. "We have an obligation to be able to offset the costs for homes" affected by a legislative mandate.

Officials noted grants would be limited to homes that have a sale price around the median for the area.