

# Suffolk GOP must devise a clean water plan

<https://www.newsday.com/opinion/editorials/nitrogen-water-pollution-suffolk-legislature-kevin-mccaffrey-ijy7ye2r>



Suffolk County Legis. Kevin McCaffrey, the legislature's presiding officer. Credit: James Carbone

**By The Editorial Board**

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The failure to pass Suffolk's wastewater treatment plan was a huge missed opportunity to deal with the county's most pressing environmental need now and into the future — providing sewers and high-tech septic systems to ensure our drinking water and groundwater are clean.

In this case, the Suffolk Legislature's Republican majority has dirty hands.

The long-awaited plan, well constructed with input from the scientific and business communities, would have provided a big funding boost for the vitally needed expansion of sewers throughout the county. Just as significantly, it would have provided money to upgrade many Suffolk homes with high-tech, nitrogen-reducing septic systems. County officials estimate about 360,000 properties don't have adequate wastewater treatment.

Reducing the amount of nitrogen created from wastewater is vital to preventing algae blooms in our bays that kill fish and harm marshlands, the most natural and cost-effective barriers in preventing homes from being flooded during storms.

This bill was killed last week — in a 10-7 vote along party lines — because of politics and in clear disregard for public health. Approval by the legislature would have allowed the plan to be placed on this November's ballot, where the public would have likely approved it, as it has other past environmental measures.

But the GOP majority claimed they had substantive issues with its funding formula, a rather dubious argument for a plan that would have provided \$3.1 billion between now and 2060. Though he supported the proposed 0.125% sales tax increase, Kevin McCaffrey, the legislature's presiding officer, complained that 75% of the money would have gone for septic systems rather than sewers. Even this misleading interpretation didn't justify the killing of this bill.

What seems more likely, as Democrats suggest, is that Republicans feared that having this environmental plan on the ballot for this November's off-year election would have brought out more Democratic voters and hurt the GOP's chances of keeping its majority in the legislature. Even if that is true, and history suggests it is not, the legislature's vote was a disservice to the public it serves.

The depth of this failure can only be comprehended when you realize just how much it hurts our environmental quality of life going forward. Stronger storms make it imperative that Long Islanders deal adequately with the threat of untreated sewage and street runoff which pollute our wells and waterways. Interestingly, the GOP's candidate for county executive, Brookhaven Town Supervisor Edward P. Romaine, supported this plan but he apparently didn't convince his fellow Republicans.

Now, Suffolk must go back to the drawing board, either with new legislation or changes to the current plan that also would need approval from the State Legislature and the governor's signature. It is now up to the Suffolk GOP and its leaders to devise their own workable plan that can gain Albany passage, or face the judgment of voters who've consistently approved solutions to our most pressing environmental problems.

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