

Long Island Communities in New York Tighten Onsite System Rules

- By David Steinkraus
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Suffolk County, New York, has been pushing to replace common cesspools with advanced onsite systems that reduce nitrogen pollution, and now a couple of communities within it are going further.

The county occupies roughly the eastern two-thirds of Long Island and includes the Hamptons, known as a weekend retreat for very wealthy residents of New York City. The county also has a large number of cesspools and their accessory problems of poor water quality. About 360,000 homes in the county, or about 75 percent of all homes, use cesspools for wastewater treatment.

The town of East Hampton, located near the tip of Long Island, voted to become the first community in the state to require low-nitrogen wastewater systems in all new construction. Low-nitrogen systems will also be required if a building undergoes substantial renovation. Commercial and municipal properties must switch to low-nitrogen systems if they are presently connected to a large-capacity cesspool.

To help homeowners fund the transition to better technology, the town board voted to adopt a rebate program that will give homeowners in critical watershed areas up to \$16,000 toward the cost of a replacement system. People not living in critical areas may receive up to \$10,000 or 75 percent of the cost.

Homeowners may pair these rebates with a county program that provides grants of \$10,000 to \$11,000 per home. At the end of May, County Executive Steve Bellone signed the Reclaim Our Water initiative's Septic Improvement Program into law. The \$10 million grant program will pay for about 200 wastewater systems annually to be converted to advanced nitrogen-removal systems.

The East Hampton grants are funded by a 2 percent tax on real estate transactions. In the fall of 2016, voters gave the town permission to use up to 20 percent of the tax revenue for water-quality improvement projects.

East Hampton's new construction rules will take effect Jan. 1, 2018.

Suffolk County has approved four systems for installation: Norweco Singulair and Hydro-Kinetic, AdvanTex from Orenco Systems, and Hydro-Action.

On Shelter Island, which is on the north side of Long Island in a bay opening into Long Island Sound, officials are considering tightening the building rules in the same way.

The town board has asked its attorney to draft legislation that would require low-nitrogen systems for new residential and commercial construction as well as for any work that changes 50 or more percent of a building.