

LIPA OKs plan to power thousands of South Shore sewer pumps

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Towers carrying PSEG Long Island transmission lines are silhouetted by the setting sun in Centereach on May 26, 2016. Credit: Newsday/John Paraskevas

Suffolk County's \$388 million plan to expand sewer access to thousands of homes on the South Shore has received a boost from LIPA, which recently approved a measure that will provide discount power and separate meters for pumps to grind and move the sewage to treatment facilities.

Long Island Power Authority trustees approved the plan unanimously at their regular board meeting last month.

If all goes as planned, more than 5,000 residents and some businesses from Babylon to Mastic would have second electric meters as part of a Suffolk County Coastal Resiliency Initiative to reduce infiltration of hundreds of

thousands of pounds of nitrogen into waterways annually. Nitrogen can enter bays and tributaries from home cesspools when the low-lying areas flood.

Residents would pay an annual sewer fee but power and connection costs would be paid by the county. LIPA would receive an upfront payment of \$750,000 to offset some costs, which include smart meters. To receive its full state and federal grant funding, Suffolk must complete the project by September 2022.

Thousands of residents have already approved referendums for projects that would cap existing septic tanks and provide connections to the new sewer systems, using grant funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and Housing and Urban Development block grants. Suffolk will pay some of the costs through borrowings.

LIPA's contribution to the program would waive around \$4.6 million in monthly service fees for the low-use meters, along with other costs. Monthly bills to be paid by the sewer district via the Suffolk Department of Public Works would amount to around \$2 per pump, LIPA said.

The new electric meters would be used exclusively to meter electricity used by grinder pumps connected to the homes for the lower-pressure sewer system, which is less costly and more efficient than the Southwest Sewer District system, which uses 30-inch pipes and gravity technology to move waste. The grinding pumps turn the sewage into a slurry.

The pumps won't work in a power outage, but each home has a tank with up to three days' capacity to handle wastewater. In the event of extended outages, the systems can be powered by a home generator, or by mobile vehicle generators that could be deployed locally, Suffolk said.

LIPA's contract with Suffolk is for seven years.

Residential customers would pay annual sewer fees of \$450 to \$650 a year, depending on district location. In addition to the 5,000 new homes, the plan also would connect around 1,500 residents to the Southwest Sewer District system.

Peter Scully, deputy Suffolk County executive, said, “Every step forward toward completion of the projects has been hard fought, and we greatly appreciate the support of the Long Island Power Authority and PSEG to help make sure these projects happen.”