

# St. James' Lake Avenue sewer line could be hooked up to a treatment plant at a condo complex, officials say

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A sewer line under Lake Avenue in St. James could be connected to a treatment plant at the Fairfield at St. James condominium community, officials said. Credit: James Carbone

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A sewer line under Lake Avenue in Smithtown's St. James hamlet —once derided as a “sewer main to nowhere” because it was laid without a connection to a treatment plant —may soon have a destination, town and Suffolk County officials said.

A treatment plant at the Fairfield at St. James condominium community, officially designated as Suffolk County Sewer District 28, is nearing the end of its useful life and could be rebuilt to process wastewater flow from properties along the avenue, said Deputy County Executive Peter Scully, sometimes known as the county’s sewer czar. “The county is designing a new facility and as part of that process, we’ve asked the design consultant to evaluate the feasibility of expanding capacity there,” he told Newsday.

Hayduk Engineering won the design contract in late summer. Scully said the firm could finish its feasibility study by late this year, though full design could take 12 to 18 months. Scully did not provide the contract cost and said estimates for construction and user fees were not yet available.

The condominium complex is close —about a mile and a half east of Lake Avenue —and the treatment plant’s elevation is lower than the avenue’s, so wastewater could flow by gravity, rather than pumps, which can be expensive to install. Lake Avenue is the primary commercial stretch in the hamlet’s downtown.

Local officials and business leaders have for years said that functioning sewers in downtown St. James would provide environmental and economic benefits, reducing nitrogen release and allowing for more

wet uses, like bigger restaurants or second-floor apartments over commercial buildings. Most properties now use septic systems or cesspools and must obey strict limits on the amount of wastewater they can generate.

“We are doing what should have been done many years ago but stopped with the Southwest Sewer District,” said Smithtown Councilman Thomas Lohmann. “We owe it to generations to come to protect our aquifer, and this is the best way to do it.”

Cost overruns, mismanagement and corruption associated with construction of the Southwest Sewer District in the 1970s are widely thought to have set back by decades the construction of sewers in Suffolk County, and about three quarters of homes in the county are still unconnected.

In Smithtown, civic and business leaders, along with elected officials, have in recent years secured \$40 million in New York State funding to expand coverage in downtown Smithtown and Kings Park, where sewers are scheduled to come online late 2025. In 2020, the town spent \$8 million to install a dry sewer line under Lake Avenue and rebuild the streetscape, its largest road project in decades.

Scully said that the existing Fairfield plant processes less than 70,000 gallons per day but is permitted for 140,000. Lake Avenue generates 69,000 gallons per day. A rebuilt plant could process up to 170,000 gallons per day, including reserve capacity, he said.

Scully and Lohmann said they believed state and federal money might pay for plant construction.

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