

Suffolk to get \$500,000 grant to study sewer taxing districts

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Suffolk County will get a \$500,000 grant to study the possibility of creation of a countywide taxing district to pay for sewer and wastewater upgrades, officials said Monday.

A consultant will look at taxing options for a water quality improvement district and costs to connect 370,000 homes to sewers or individual systems designed to reduce nitrogen pollution.

Kevin McDonald, conservation project director for public lands at The Nature Conservancy on Long Island, said the work would "put meat on the bones to a concept that has been kicked around for awhile."

But Legis. Tom Cilmi (R-Bay Shore), minority leader, said the county already collects money for water quality projects.

"If there is a better way to spend that money, let's discuss it, but our taxpayers cannot afford another tax," Cilmi said.

Nearly 75 percent of Suffolk homes are on cesspools or septic tanks. But putting sewers in denser areas or advanced treatment systems in other areas throughout Suffolk County would cost \$8 billion, according to previous county studies. Officials have not discussed publicly how they would pay for it.

"It was a huge historical mistake, the development of Suffolk County without sewers," James Tierney, deputy commissioner of the office of water resources for the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, told the Suffolk County Legislature's environment committee.

Richard V. Guardino Jr., executive director of the Long Island Regional Planning Council, said the group will vote on the grant at its meeting Oct. 2.

The county would issue an RFP for a consultant to study the possibility of a taxing district and enter into an agreement by the end of the year or early 2019. The work is part of the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan, a state-run initiative with Nassau and Suffolk Counties to reduce nitrogen, which has been blamed on algal blooms harmful to marine life.

Suffolk County Executive spokesman Jason Elan said, “We look forward to studying the feasibility of this proposal, its impact to the taxpayer, and if it will be helpful to our overall water quality efforts.”

The county also is considering whether to establish requirements that advanced wastewater treatment systems be installed when homes are sold or in new construction. Some East End towns and Brookhaven already require installation of such systems in certain areas.