

Suffolk legislators shelve sewer expansion plan

<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/suffolk/suffolk-county-sewers-ajldkw17>



Adrienne Esposito leads environmentalists, labor unions and building trade groups at a rally outside the Suffolk County center in Riverhead to support a referendum on a sales tax increase to fund wastewater treatment. Credit: John Roca

By Vera Chinese vera.chinese@newsday.com [@VeraChinese](https://twitter.com/VeraChinese) Updated June 22, 2023

Suffolk County legislators on Wednesday shelved a plan for a major expansion of wastewater treatment that would have included a sales tax increase to pay for it.

Members of the county legislature, where Republicans hold a majority, voted largely along party lines to stall proposals to consolidate the county's 27 sewer districts and advance a voter referendum on a .125% tax increase.

Both were sent back to the Budget and Finance Committees, making it unlikely that the referendum would be approved before an Aug. 4 deadline to put it on the November ballot.

Representatives of County Executive Steve Bellone say both measures are needed to fund and implement the county Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan, a 50-year, \$4 billion effort to reverse nitrogen pollution in Suffolk's ground and surface waters.

WHAT TO KNOW

- **A plan for a major expansion** of wastewater treatment in Suffolk County hit a dead end Wednesday in the county legislature.
- **Legislators voted largely along party lines** to stall proposals to consolidate the county's sewer districts and advance a voter referendum on a sales tax hike to pay for the expansion.
- **Republican legislators cited concerns** that three-quarters of the tax revenue would go toward individual septic systems, which they said would primarily benefit homeowners on the East End.
- Legislators voted 10-6 on both the consolidation and sales tax proposals.
- McCaffrey said legislators could seek changes at the state level and try again in the future. Bills authorizing both proposals had cleared the State Legislature earlier this year.
- “We are all committed to clean water here,” McCaffrey said. “I think we need to take another crack at this in terms of state legislation to get it right.”
- Deputy County Executive Peter Scully countered that the money slated for sewers could be used as a local match to secure additional state and federal funds. The measure also would extend the existing 0.25% sales tax-funded Suffolk County Drinking Water Protection Fund—which also in part funds sewers—until 2060.
- More than three dozen people signed up to speak in support of the plans, including environmentalists who rallied earlier Wednesday alongside labor unions and building trade representatives.