



NEWSDAY / JOHN PARASKEVAS

County Executive Steve Bellone describes plans to reduce nitrogen in Suffolk waters.

Sandy aid for sewers a good start in Suffolk

THE COLUMN
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In Suffolk, in the 21st century, only a third of the county has access to sewers. Which is why there's a significant problem with nitrogen in the water in some areas.

Meanwhile, the federal government has some \$3 billion available to help superstorm Sandy-slammed municipalities strengthen infrastructure before the next monster storm hits.

Some might think it a stretch, but County Executive Steve Bellone's plan to apply for Sandy-related money to help resolve Suffolk's sewer and nitrogen problem is a good move.

In fact, Sandy-related funding could be the kick-start Long Island needs to address its sagging infrastructure.

As it is, Nassau's already getting a big boost.

In January, Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo announced \$730 million in grants to help rebuild Nassau's long-deteriorating Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant, which failed during the storm.

Thus far, it's the largest aid package awarded on Long Island through the state Office of Storm Recovery, which is funneling down some of the federal money available for relief.

The state's NY Rising program has \$2.097 billion in federal funding that is slated to be divided among housing, community reconstruction and infrastructure needs.

It bears noting that almost 18 months after the storm, many Long Islanders are still waiting for funding to help get them back into homes destroyed by Sandy. It's unacceptable that they've been awaiting financial help for so long. Part of the region's recovery lies in

bolstering infrastructure, too.

In Suffolk, Bellone is seeking nearly \$1 billion to expand the county's few sewer systems to 12,000 South Shore homes.

He's also seeking money for a damaged Bergen Point Sewage Treatment Plant outflow pipe.

The sewer funding, should it come through, would bolster Suffolk's efforts to restore wetlands and marshes in the Great South Bay.

The plan is to swap home cesspools and septic tanks in a string of shoreline communities with sewers — a move that would reduce nitrogen pollution in marshes and wetlands that become natural barriers in storms, officials said last week.

Suffolk's wish list?

Building a new sewage plant and hooking in 5,300 homes in the Mastic, Shirley and Mastic Beach area, near Forge River.

Extending the Southwest Sewer District in Deer Park/North Babylon to 5,500 homes near Carlls River.

And extending other already existing sewer systems to 1,300 homes in Oakdale, near the Connetquot River.

In addition, the county would seek Federal Emergency Management Agency funding to replace the damaged pipe — which carries sewage from the plant in West Babylon out into the Atlantic Ocean — that nearly failed during the 2012 storm.

Taken together, Bellone's request and Nassau's award will do a lot of good.

Even at that, both counties need more, much more, when it comes to addressing an infrastructure desperate for improvements.

But it's a start.

Especially for 12,000 lucky homeowners who — should Bellone's funding requests come through — would leave Suffolk's ubiquitous cesspools and septic systems behind.



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