

# A discussion about Suffolk's wastewater treatment systems

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## Deputy executive hands out stats and details at Rotary

In 2017, New York State announced a \$75 million septic system fund to assist homeowners with the costs to replace aging septic systems allotted over five years; Suffolk County got \$10 million of the award. Deputy County Executive Peter Scully gave those statistics and other details at a recent Sayville Rotary Club meeting about the county's program to clean up coastal waters by replacing cesspools with approved wastewater treatment systems.

On March 17, 2020, Suffolk County legislators approved a \$4 billion Wastewater Plan that included individual wastewater treatment systems.

"The Septic Replacement Grant Program has been rocking and rolling since COVID," said Scully. "We've had 320 residents apply, and we received another \$10 million from the state."

Eligible property owners can be reimbursed 50 percent of eligible costs. "The code requires three years of maintenance by the manufacturer; then the homeowner takes over, about \$200 to \$400 a year," he said.

Costs to install a system in the front yard for easy access vary at between \$15,000 to \$20,000. Electrical costs to run the system range from \$5 to \$20 a month. Once selected, residents are notified by the Department of Economic Development and Planning. The homeowner then enters into an agreement with the supplier.

The Fuji Clean USA system seems to be the best in value and performance, he said. (The Fuji Clean USA website cites their system as being Suffolk County's No. 1 innovative and alternative wastewater system.)

Hydro Action also appears to be the most popular participants in the program.

Suffolk County will also require wastewater systems be installed in new construction as of July 1.

"This is a new industry," he said. "The active components installed and maintained require training for liquid waste and the manufacturing companies who make the components are creating jobs in Suffolk County," he said.

But tens of thousands need to be swapped out, he said, and the grant program is the first phase of a long-range plan. About 74 percent of Suffolk County's 1.5 million residents utilize

cesspools. The wastewater systems will restore clean waters to the Great South Bay and reduce recurring nitrogen blooms, which kills marine wildlife.

The IRS ruled last year that septic grants are taxable income after Suffolk County comptroller John Kennedy petitioned the IRS.

Scully said the county is in the process of straightening out the dilemma of the grants being taxed as income. “We have the petition pending,” he said.

Nassau congressman Tom Suozzi and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand introduced legislation to ensure Long Islanders aren’t taxed on grants received to upgrade their septic systems last month.

Sewers are still part of the planning. “But they are very expensive and the county’s argument is that part of coastal resiliency money can be used for sewers,” Scully said.

Scully mentioned Patchogue’s sewer expansion stall; Gov. Andrew Cuomo made an \$18 million commitment for additional sewers—now costs jumped up to more than \$75 million from bidders. “We hope to attract smaller companies as bidders,” he said.

Congressman Lee Zeldin recently included Patchogue’s expansion \$9,400,000, in a Community Project Request.

(Other sewer systems dead-ended include the Mastic-Shirley sewer project because of escalating costs.)

“Since 2014, the county executive said, ‘Let’s set up a multi-layer certification project where we get six months worth of data from a company that makes wastewater treatment systems and then, after assessing the data, give procedural approval,’” said Scully.

“The thinking was, ‘We have 360,000 homes with cesspools. Would you donate one of these systems and prove that it works?’” It also had to be easy and affordable.

Four different systems were used with Fuji selected as No. 1.



*Sayville Rotary president Brendan McCurdy introduced deputy county executive Peter Scully recently, who discussed the county’s mission on residential wastewater treatment systems. SCN/Leuzzi Sayville Rotary president Brendan McCurdy introduced deputy county executive Peter Scully recently, who discussed the county’s mission on residential wastewater treatment systems.*

