

# Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone touts \$100M plan for sewer projects

<https://www.newsday.com/long-island/politics/bellone-carlls-river-forge-river-sewer-suffolk-1.50224210>



Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone on April 13, 2021. Credit: James Carbone

By **Rachelle Blidner**

[rachelle.blidner@newsday.com](mailto:rachelle.blidner@newsday.com) [@rachelleblidner](https://twitter.com/rachelleblidner)

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Part of Suffolk's largest sewer expansion in decades could begin later this year with help from a \$100 million spending package, including nearly half in federal funds, if a proposal announced Thursday by County Executive Steve Bellone goes forward.

The influx of funding, including \$46 million from the federal government, would help the county connect homes to sewers, provide funds to replace outdated septic systems, expand an existing sewer district and create a new one.

At a news conference in Lake Ronkonkoma, Bellone touted the proposal as keeping with the spirit of environmental awareness Thursday, which was also Earth Day.

"This \$100 million commitment today, on Earth Day, is historic," Bellone said, "[and will] allow us to leap forward in accomplishing our goal of solving the water quality crisis."

More than 5,500 homes in Babylon, Brookhaven and Islip Towns would be connected to sewers after escalating costs jeopardized the future of the Carlls River and Forge River sewer projects, said deputy Suffolk County Executive and water czar Peter Scully.

The spending package — including \$45 million proposed from county coffers, and \$10 million recently awarded by a state septic system grant program — would also help provide about 3,000 homeowners with \$10,000 grants to replace outdated septic systems and cesspools, Scully said.

Altogether, the spending package will help eliminate more than 8,000 outdated septic systems and cesspools that have posed a "significant public health and environmental problem for a very long time," Scully said.

The county share of the proposal will likely have to be approved by the Suffolk Legislature, presiding officer Robert Calarco (D-Patchogue) said.

About 360,000 homes, or 75% of county residences, are unsewered, and many use outdated wastewater management systems that leach nitrogen into groundwater and contribute to algal blooms and fish kills, county officials have said.

The federal funding will help Suffolk move ahead with voter-approved plans to create a sewer district in the Mastic-Shirley area near the Forge River for about 1,900 homes, and expand the Southwest Sewer District in West Babylon and North Babylon, as well as in Wyandanch near the Carlls River to include 2,200 homes. About 1,500 homes in the existing southwest district in Islip and Babylon towns could be connected to sewers with \$24 million proposed from a county reserve fund, officials said.

Those projects were expected to cost \$388 million, and the county had secured that funding largely through federal grants, Scully said. But estimates rose to an expected \$405 million after the county received bid proposals, which threatened the projects' future, he said.

The county is expected to fill the funding gap after Congress passed the \$1.9-trillion American Rescue Plan, which allocated \$283 million in federal funding to Suffolk, officials said.

Construction on the Carlls River project could start as early as the fall, and the Forge River project wouldn't break ground until 2022, Scully said.

U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), who helped secure the federal funding, said in a statement, "I'm glad to see County Executive Bellone use a portion of this aid to help fill the funding gap and advance these long-awaited sewer infrastructure improvements."

County officials said they are lobbying for more federal funding to complete planned sewer projects in Patchogue and Oakdale.