

# Nitrogen woes no easy fix



**POLITICS  
& POWER**

Rick Brand

rick.brand@newsday.com

**W**ith all the flourish he could muster, Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone last week signed into law an \$8 million grant program that along with low-interest loans will largely pay for high-tech septic systems to combat nitrogen pollution in local waters.

"With a stroke of the pen, we have moved a step closer to reversing decades of nitrogen pollution by providing homeowners the tools . . . to reclaim our waters," said Bellone, who was surrounded by county lawmakers, planners and health officials.

But the road to resolving Suffolk's water woes will be neither

simple nor quick.

The new systems can cost as much as \$18,000, and the \$2 million in annual county funding through 2021 will be enough to upgrade only 800 homes over that span, county officials conceded.

With 360,000 suburban homes with cesspools that do nothing to reduce nitrogen pollution, that initial funding will address less than 1 percent of the problem.

But Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's \$2.5 billion state infrastructure bond issue includes \$75 million for sewer improvements. And the county hopes to get all or a large share of the money because state funding rules mandate that programs must be ready to go, Deputy County Executive Peter Scully said.

Suffolk health officials say they expect to be ready to start taking applications for the septic system grants by July 1.

While Scully says that \$75 million will upgrade just 5,000 to 6,000 Suffolk homes, both efforts combined would fix less than 2 percent of homes with cesspools. East Hampton and Southampton towns also are eyeing funding for the high-tech septic systems using 20 percent of their community preservation funds, financed by the property transfer tax.

"These are all baby steps," said Assem. Fred Thiele (I-Sag Harbor). "But it's like turning around a battleship. It will need a 10-year commitment and an ongoing source of revenue."

While Thiele has filed a bill to permit a Suffolk referendum to create a still unspecified funding source for more hookups, he and Bellone see little chance for state action this year. But Thiele said he hopes initial funding for grants and loans will demonstrate public interest to connect

to the costly new systems. Bellone's initial proposal for a water fee went nowhere last year.

"Right now, the State Senate is lukewarm at best," said Thiele. "But if they see 3,000 homeowners apply, it may help to create a funding source."

Yet the ambitious grant program is fraught with potential peril that could sway public sentiment.

Just getting staff hired and ready to process applications, installations and monitor new systems will be daunting. The durability of new high-tech units, which have electric and mechanical components, have been tested for only the past year and could come into question over time. The new systems also require maintenance that can cost \$600 a year and could face difficulties if electricity goes out in a storm.

Timing also could become an issue.

The environmental review isn't finished, nor are health regulations to govern the overall program. Yet documents connected to the review suggest that new systems should accompany all new home construction starting Jan. 1. Builders oppose the idea, saying the county should concentrate first on the most vulnerable areas. Bellone aides say the issue is unsettled.

Some remain unconvinced about the merit of the initiative.

"There's no doubt . . . nitrogen is a problem in some surface waters, but these complicated, expensive systems are not the answer," said Peter Akras, an opponent who spoke at the legislative hearing on the grant program.

However, Legis. Bridget Fleming (D-Sag Harbor) said the initiative would "jump-start the desperately needed replacement of outdated systems and reverse the impairment of our waters."

## YOU NEED TO FEEL THIS

# SEMI-ANNUAL CARIBBEAN SALE

**SAVE UP TO 66%\***

- Free Nights • Kids Stay & Eat Free
- PLUS • Guaranteed Room Upgrades
- \$200 Air Credit • UP TO \$2200 in Resort Credits

Visit our website for our great offers: [LibertyTravel.com/Caribbean](http://LibertyTravel.com/Caribbean)

**LIBERTY**GroupTravel

Destination Weddings • Vow Renewals  
Multigenerational Travel • Family Reunions  
Bachelorette & Girl Getaways  
Bachelor & Guy Getaways  
Religious, School & Club Trips

Let us plan your next group vacation

**1.866.280.4719**

**AARP** Member-Advantages  
Real Possibilities

Ask about exclusive AARP Member Benefits at Liberty Travel

**PRICE BEAT GUARANTEE**  
If you happen to find a cheaper available price, we'll beat it! Conditions apply.\*

## LIBERTY TRAVEL

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND PLACES

Call or visit one of our 125+ store locations nationwide

# 1.800.764.5000

Click: [LibertyTravel.com/Newsday](http://LibertyTravel.com/Newsday) or Text Us: 201.749.1040

\*Conditions Apply: Additional fees for baggage may apply. The prices do not include baggage fees or other optional fees charged directly by the airlines. Please refer to <http://www.LibertyTravel.com/flights/baggage-fees> or contact your airline for detailed information regarding their checked baggage policies. Special promotions valid on new bookings only and prices are valid at time of publication and may change prior to booking. Prices are per person, based on double occupancy accommodations with round-trip airfare departing from New York is limited. Seats may not be available on all flights. Rates and/or package prices on airfares are subject to holiday blackouts, peak period surcharges, and cancellation charges may be applicable of up to the full price paid depending on the fare and/or package and when it is cancelled. U.S. or international government imposed taxes and fees of up to \$60 may apply on arrivals and departures depending on the itinerary chosen, and are payable to the appropriate airport authority. Some fares may be non-refundable, but may be exchanged for a fee of up to \$200, plus any additional airfare costs due to difference in new airfares. Other restrictions may apply. Contact Liberty Travel for further details. Caribbean Sale: Save up to 68% based on a 4-night at AIsol Tiará Cap Cana. Valid for travel thru 12/22/17; must book by 6/16/17. Receive guaranteed room upgrade and 2 kids 12 and under stay & eat free based on a 4-night stay at Moon Palace Jamaica. Valid for travel thru 12/22/17; must book by 6/16/17. Receive up to \$200 air credit per room per stay while supplies last and up to \$2200 in My Time Select resort credits per room per stay based on a 5-night stay at Paradise Punta Cana Resort. Valid for travel thru 7/1-12/22/17; must book by 6/30/17. Receive 1 night free based on a 4-night stay at Westin Grand Cayman Seven Mile Beach Resort & Spa. Valid for travel 6/22-12/22/17; must book by 6/16/17. Offers valid for travel 12/22/17; must book by 6/16/17. AARP member benefits are provided by third parties, not by AARP or its affiliates. Providers pay a royalty fee to AARP for the use of its intellectual property. These fees are used for the general purposes of AARP. AARP does not employ or endorse travel agents. Some provider offers are subject to change and may have restrictions. Please contact the provider directly for details. \*Applies to genuine written quotes for travel on the same day & itinerary from the United States of America (ATA)/ARC-registered businesses and websites. Quote must be presented prior to purchase. Subject to availability. Valid for travel departing within United States of America. The Price Beat Guarantee Policy is not only to match the competition but also to beat the price by \$1 per adult and \$1 per child. Please see [LibertyTravel.com/pricebeat](http://LibertyTravel.com/pricebeat) for more details. Liberty Travel does not assume responsibility for any errors or omissions in the content of the offers displayed.