

Sewage plan overflowing with Suffolk politics

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The Suffolk County Legislature in Hauppauge. Credit: Rick Kopstein
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Daily Point

GOP calculations hold up project to reduce water pollution

When a long-in-the-works plan to reduce nitrogen pollution in Suffolk County’s ground and surface waters came to an abrupt halt recently in the county legislature, the major criticism voiced by Republicans who blocked it was that the initiative contained too much money to help individual homeowners replace failing septic systems and not enough for sewers.

The real roadblock, numerous sources tell *The Point*, is pure politics.

At issue is a measure passed by the State Legislature to put a referendum on the November ballot asking Suffolk voters to approve a .125% sales tax increase to fund the wastewater treatment plan. But the county legislature must vote first to put the proposal on the ballot — in a year in which all 18 legislative seats are also up for grabs.

“The Conservative Party does not want an environmental referendum on the ballot because they think that will work against reelecting Republicans in marginal districts,” one political insider said.

Insiders point to three first-time legislators who defeated Democrats in 2021 — Dominick Thorne, who beat then-presiding officer Robert Calarco in the 7th district; Manuel Esteban, who nipped Susan Berland in the 16th; and Stephanie Bontempi, who defeated Mark Cuthbertson in the 18th. The GOP also is eyeing two other seats where Democrats are not running for reelection — Al Krupski in the 1st

and Bridget Fleming in the 2nd. And Democrat Sarah Anker, who squeaked out a 2021 win in a ballot recount in the 6th district, is term-limited.

“The Republicans correctly believe they are well-positioned for this November election and don’t want this on the ballot,” a source said of the referendum.

“They don’t want to do anything that brings out a potential Democratic vote that may hurt their chances to continue and maintain a majority,” another observer added.

While Republican hopes of increasing their majority are buoyed by the red wave that swept Suffolk in particular last November, those results also call into question the validity of their argument about the referendum.

Republican Lee Zeldin easily won the governor’s race in Suffolk with more than 58% of the vote, even as a \$4 billion state environmental bond act gained passage with nearly 64% approval. That would seem to belie the theory that environmental initiatives inspire party-line voting.

But in Suffolk’s long history of political wars, logic often is a casualty.