



## Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP) - Monthly Newsletter

*The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation sent this bulletin on 01/28/2022 12:30 PM EST*

## Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP) - Monthly Newsletter Suffolk County Update

*In this month's issue of the LINAP newsletter, we highlight the ongoing nitrogen reduction initiatives lead by our LINAP partners in Suffolk County.*

- Suffolk County Coastal Resiliency Initiative
- Countywide Wastewater Management District
- Septic Improvement Program
- Environmental Excellence Award
- Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan
- Environmental Health Information Management System

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### Suffolk County Coastal Resiliency Initiative

In 2015 Suffolk County was awarded \$390 million in funding through the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery to install sewers in communities that are in unsewered, low-lying areas along the County's south shore that had been inundated by Superstorm Sandy. The sewer projects, known as the [Suffolk County Coastal Resiliency Initiative](#), marks the largest investment in water quality infrastructure in the County in more than 40 years and will eliminate over 7,000 cesspools and septic systems in the Carlls River Watershed (North Babylon, West Babylon, Wyandanch), Patchogue River Watershed (Village of Patchogue), the Forge River Watershed (Mastic) and Connetquot River Watershed (Oakdale); improving water quality, boosting economic development and protecting against storm surges by strengthening wetlands. This represents the largest expansion of sewer infrastructure in Suffolk County in nearly 50 years!

The first of these sewer projects broke ground on October 29, 2021 in the Carlls River Watershed and will connect more than 2,180 properties to sewers by September 2024. And on January 27, 2022 the [County broke ground in the Forge River Watershed](#). This project will connect roughly 1,889 homes and over 150 businesses to a state-of-the-art sewage treatment facility. Both projects will use low-pressure sewer systems, that include pumps buried in front of each house; a method that is cost effective and causes less construction disruption.

The County also received additional grant money from the State to expand sewers in the Kings Park and Smithtown Business Districts. Construction is scheduled to begin in 2022 and 2023 respectively.



*Suffolk County officials and construction leaders at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Carlls River Watershed sewer expansion project. Photo credit: Suffolk County*

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## Countywide Wastewater Management District

Last year the County released a feasibility study and implementation plan to guide the establishment of a Countywide Wastewater Management District (CWMD). The study identified essential actions required to establish the CWMD as well as the management structures and financing required for its operation.

Establishing a CWMD in Suffolk County will provide the critical administrative and organizational structure to identify, evaluate and manage the wastewater infrastructure needed to improve groundwater and surface water quality. This includes the replacement of outdated cesspools and septic systems with Innovative Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems.

The Countywide Wastewater Management District will, in a phased approach:

- Create the administrative structure required to implement the [Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan](#)
- Serve as vehicle for new investments in water quality infrastructure to make system upgrades and sewer connections affordable for homeowners

- Spur local job growth to help fuel the post-COIVD economic recovery through establishment of a stable and recurring revenue stream to fund advanced wastewater treatment
- Provide prescriptive advantages of a district for on-site installations comparable to those extended to sewer connections
- Provide for greater equity in sewer charges by equalizing rates among individual sewer districts

As the next step in the process, a Task Force composed of environmental, civic, and business leaders have been working to develop an implementation strategy and timeline for the proposed District.

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## Septic Improvement Program

Suffolk County continues to effectively transition from the use of outdated cesspools and septic systems to Innovative and Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems (I/A OWTS). Under the County's [Septic Improvement Program](#), homeowners are eligible for a grant for the purchase and installation of an approved I/A OWTS and associated engineering and design services. Under the program, homeowners who decide to replace their cesspool or septic system with the new and advanced technologies are eligible up to \$30,000 in grants from Suffolk County and the [New York State Septic System Replacement Fund](#) to offset the cost of one of the new systems. To date the County has awarded over 3,000 grants to homeowners!

In furtherance of these extraordinary efforts to replace cesspools and septic systems, an amendment to the County's sanitary code, that was unanimously passed, went into effect on July 1, 2021 requiring I/A OWTS on all new construction and major reconstruction. The law also allows greater flexibility for the use of small sewer plants in downtown business districts.



*Innovative/Alternative Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Installation. Photo Credit: Suffolk County*

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## **Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program wins the Department of Environmental Conservation's Environmental Excellence Award**

The Suffolk County Department of Health Service Septic Improvement Program was among the Department of Environmental Conservation's Environmental Excellence Awards winners this past year!

The [Environmental Excellence Awards](#) are presented each year in recognition of innovative programs and that show an outstanding commitment to environmental sustainability, social responsibility, and economic viability. A committee of representatives from the public and private sectors helped to select this year's awardees who were recognized for pioneering projects to ensure inclusivity, explore clean energy, and improve water quality.



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## **Subwatersheds Wastewater Plan (SWP)**

The [SWP](#) is a rigorous, science-based roadmap for shifting away from reliance on conventional cesspools and septic systems, which are the primary source of nitrogen pollution in our local waterways and groundwater. It is intended to guide policymakers in the development of a Suffolk County Wastewater Management Program that seeks to mitigate this pollution. The SWP is the product of years of intensive research, documentation, modeling, and evaluation of all of Suffolk County's water resources and provides a parcel-specific roadmap on how to address the nitrogen crisis through wastewater upgrades and other nitrogen pollution mitigation strategies.

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) approved the SWP as a [Nine Element \(9E\) Watershed Plan](#). The nine minimum elements are intended to ensure that the contributing causes and sources of nonpoint source pollution are identified, that key stakeholders are involved in the planning process, and that restoration and protection strategies address water quality. The County's 9E Plan is the first of its kind and will open up the County's watersheds for additional State and Federal funding opportunities to advance water quality improvement initiatives. Also, the SWP was granted the 2021 Outstanding Groundwater Protection Project Award by the National Groundwater Association Awards Committee!



The goal of implementing the SWP is to arrest and reverse the trend of worsening water quality in Suffolk County within 10 years. A Long-Term Monitoring Plan (LTMP) and Adaptive Management Plan (ADMP) and a Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) Capacity study are important initiatives recommended in the SWP. These plans will put the structure in place to track such trends, and recommend adjustments to the SWP, if needed. The County released a [Request for Proposals](#) on January 20, 2022 to seek a consultant to prepare a LTMP and AMP. Having an LTMP and AMP in place will be critical to properly monitor the implementation of the SWP, and adapt it to changing conditions over its anticipated 30+ year duration. A critical element of the LTMP will be the pursuit of cross collaboration with stakeholders that maintain active monitoring programs in the waters of Suffolk County or with programs advancing the reduction of nitrogen. The LTMP will identify, to the extent possible, the elements of existing monitoring programs that can be leveraged and synthesized into a unified countywide monitoring strategy, with the goal of eliminating program redundancy.

The STP Capacity study is looking at the current capacity, design flow rates, actual rates, loading rates and design standards of private STPs to determine if there is capacity to connect additional parcels to sewers throughout Suffolk County.



*Photo credit: Long Island Regional Planning Council*

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## **Suffolk County Environmental Health Information Management System (“EHIMS”)**

In 2019 Suffolk County began a phased launch of its Environmental Health Information Management System (EHIMS). EHIMS provides a centralized, GIS linked, database and public interface to support permitting, oversight, and enforcement of I/A OWTS and their maintenance

countywide. EHIMS allows citizens to submit applications, upload documents, make payments, and get real-time status updates through an online portal. The system also improves communication between County offices through a shared database and shared workflows that notifies different groups when there is a new application or task that needs their attention. Since the first phase of EHIMS launched communication between the County and licensed professionals has improved significantly, as submissions and revisions are now shared electronically.

An additional phase of EHIMS began this month and will allow for improved management activities including:

- electronic submission of I/A OWTS operation and maintenance contracts, registrations, service reports and sample analysis results by licensed professionals via an online public portal;
- automated updating and tracking of maintenance events performed on all installed I/A OWTS to ensure proper operation for nitrogen reduction and notification; and
- tracking upon confirmation of non-compliance with applicable standards.