



## Data will boost plans for sewers

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ORLEANS — After two years of delay, Cape towns may soon be getting the water quality data they need to move ahead with plans for sewers and treatment plants.

The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection and the University of Massachusetts-Dartmouth finally signed a new contract last week for the Massachusetts Estuaries Project.

As part of the project, DEP oversees the towns' wastewater plans developed with the university's computer models of nitrogen levels, pollution and possible remedies in each town's coastal waters.

In 2007, the estuaries project stalled during a dispute over who owned the data produced by the university. Due to the lack of a contract, the state wouldn't pay the school.

Just a year ago, towns thought their wait was over when DEP and UMass officials announced they had signed an agreement and expected to re-start work within a week or two.

Instead, the two parties took until last week to actually write and sign a contract that says the university will provide access to its computer models and share its data.

"The last two years were admittedly a disaster. And there's plenty of blame to go around, whether it's the universities, the states, or the (state) controller's fault," said Andrew Gottlieb, executive director of the county's Cape Cod Water Protection Collaborative, during a meeting Wednesday night with Orleans selectmen.

He announced the contract that night as the designated spokesman for a row of officials at the meeting, including State Senator Rob O'Leary, D-Barnstable; David DeLorenzo, DEP executive director of municipal services; and Brian Howes, UMass professor and head scientist with the Massachusetts Estuaries Project.

The dispute cost Cape towns time, money and political momentum. Harwich, for example, appropriated \$500,000 in 2006 to start work on its plan for Nantucket Sound waters. The town suspended its work in March 2008, due to the dispute.

A report about Nauset Inlet in Orleans was due first in June 2005, and then in June of this year.

Now the draft report is due late this year, Gottlieb said.

During the delay, opposition in Orleans has grown to the point where a petition to stop wastewater planning is circulating in town, Selectman Mark Carron said.

"With all due respect to the university, every deadline we've heard from them hasn't been met," he said. "So that isn't reliable information for us so far."

To keep some reports coming, UMass and Barnstable County last September announced an interim plan to raise money to produce reports for nine towns, including Harwich, Orleans, Yarmouth, Dennis and Dartmouth. Some of those reports are now completed, Gottlieb said yesterday.

Yarmouth got most of its Parkers River report yesterday. Harwich can expect reports for Wychmere Harbor, Saquatucket Harbor and Allens Harbor in a couple of weeks, and for Herring River in early September. Dennis is scheduled to get a draft report for Sesuit Harbor late this year, he said.

Under the new contract, the UMass computer model will be available to qualified researchers but not until the two parties develop a protocol for its use by sometime this fall.

"We're not the only town — a lot of towns are being held hostage here," Orleans Selectman Margie Fulcher said. "A

lot of towns would like to be able to arrive at some decisions and understandings and move forward. Please make the model available as soon as possible."

Gottlieb said that "it's a huge milestone that the two entities have an agreement that the model will be available to outside entities."

Orleans is among the towns that want to check the UMass model and try different scenarios for ways to remove nitrogen that comes from septic systems and other land-based sources from coastal waters before spending millions of dollars on wastewater design.

Nitrogen acts like a fertilizer for rapid-growing plants like algae that can overwhelm an ecosystem, robbing water of oxygen and killing off most or all life.

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