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Jan 16 2009 **Wequaquet sewers may need to wait**

Written by David Still II

Alternatives sought as expense, new sewer demands rise

Bringing sewers to the Wequaquet Lake area of Centerville has long topped the town's sewer expansion plan, but that could be changing in the face of state and federal requirements to improve coastal waters. One of the questions around the table during the town council wastewater subcommittee's Jan. 7 meeting was whether the expense, effort and addition of flow to the Hyannis sewer plant was worth it if there's no benefit to water quality.

Sewering for the Wequaquet watershed is about providing relief to property owners who cannot meet minimum depth-to-groundwater systems for systems that essentially fail for standing water. The current sewer estimate per household ranges up to \$40,000.

Wequaquet Lake is also under no state or federal order to be cleaned up, and its waters are in relatively good condition. A recently completed report shows that while there has been an increase in phosphorous, generally speaking the lake is in good shape and does not meet any threshold for being impaired. That's not the case for the town's southwestern embayments, which are classified as impaired under federal Clean Water Act standards.

It was that finding through the Massachusetts Estuaries Program that provided the impetus for the Board of Health's interim wastewater regulation. That regulation covers residential properties for much of the southwest two-thirds of town. It allows up to 440 gallons of wastewater discharge per acre per day in areas contributing to impaired waters, as defined by the MEP.

That proposal is now recommended to extend to the commercial properties within that area, which the board of health is expected to take up Feb. 10.

Board of Health Chairman Dr. Wayne Miller told the committee that the interim regulation is not intended as a solution, but a step to help things from getting worse.

"Our interim regulation does not correct the problem," Miller told the committee. "We're looking to minimize any further damage."

Among the things the committee wanted to pin down was at what point the interim regulation goes away. "As soon as you have a comprehensive plan in place, this goes bye-bye," Miller said, holding a copy of the regulations in his hand.

The next step toward such a plan is a nutrient management plan for the entire town, which will look at the information coming out of the MEP and ways to limit nitrogen flows.

"This is going to be a multi-faceted plan, not just wastewater," Department of Public Works Director Mark Ells told the committee.

Ells expects the report to take about 18 months to complete.

Non-sewering solutions include changes in zoning, wetlands restoration to intercept nutrients and requiring on-site innovative alternative systems.

In that vein, a \$1 million dredging program for Mill Pond in Marstons Mills is expected to dramatically increase the pond's ability to capture and retain nitrogen flowing into it from the Indian Ponds watershed.

That process, called attenuation, is a relatively inexpensive way to reduce nitrogen for large areas.

Committee member Lindsey Counsell, executive director of the nonprofit Three Bays, Inc., said that the Wequaquet sewer area is too broadly defined. He believes that some of the areas can be addressed through creative means with traditional septic systems, which could refine and narrow the areas that truly need sewers.

Counsell, who has talked with the state Department of Environmental Protection on the issue, suggested allowing easements under roadways for septic leaching areas, which was suggested to him through DEP.

The committee is also looking at how the town could tap into the state's newly created wastewater management loan program, which offers zero interest loans for infrastructure. The program also requires adoption of growth- and sewer-neutral policies so the addition of sewers does not promote additional

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The committee meets next on Jan. 21 at town hall beginning at 4:30 p.m.

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