

State: Install sewers, build treatment plants

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ORLEANS — Stay focused on building treatment plants and sewers, state officials told warring town committees yesterday.

Currently, Orleans is proposing to install sewers through 52 percent of town and build two treatment plants at the existing Tri-town plant site off Route 6A. The goal of the recommended \$150 million plan is to divert nitrogen, primarily from septic systems, that is polluting the town's coastal waters and ponds.

"I really don't see us looking at any other option," DEP environmental engineer Brian Dudley told selectmen and two town wastewater committees yesterday.

With that direction, town administrator John Kelly said he would OK a contract, stalled since Jan. 23, to review the suitability of the existing plant site for future construction.

DEP's advice ended "an unsolvable impasse about how to move forward," Augusta McKusick said after yesterday's meeting.

She is chairman of the town's wastewater study committee that spent eight years developing and winning voters' approval of the town's draft treatment plan.

Her committee has been increasingly at odds in recent months with the wastewater validation committee, appointed several months by selectmen for its members' scientific, engineering and construction experience.

Before the town moved ahead, the validation committee wanted more time and money to study alternatives to the expensive sewerage, such as dredging organic sediments out of inlets, aerating or adding oxygen to inlets, and using septic systems that remove higher amounts of nitrogen.

Paul Amman of the validation committee said it was better to consider dredging and other alternatives before the town is committed to spending a lot of money. Without a better idea of the total plan, the town risks over-designing the project's capacity, he said.

In response, Dudley said most of the committee's alternatives don't meet the state's goal of reducing the amount of nitrogen going into coastal waters. Instead, they treat the symptoms of pollution caused by the nitrogen.

Those alternatives may be allowable as pilot projects later in the town's plan, both Dudley and DEP's David DeLorenzo said. But, they emphasized, don't delay building the treatment plant and sewers and getting in line for state funding.