

County committee explores wastewater options

Creation of regional entity not a done deal

By Edward F. Maroney

Don't expect a Capewide referendum this November on creating a regional wastewater management authority.

The fall of 2005, when the county's charter is up for its regu-

lar five-year review, is the target date for asking voters to support some form of collaborative effort between the Cape's 15 towns and its regional government to do a better job of removing nitrogen from the water we flush back into the aquifer.

That consensus was reached Wednesday at a meeting of the Blue Ribbon Committee on Wastewater appointed by the county commissioners. Even at its first session last Thursday, it was already clear that some members were

skeptical about the need for a new organization to manage wastewater and perhaps even water supplies.

Falmouth Wastewater Supt. Amy Lowell and Bob Duncanson, director of Chatham's department of health and environment, led the way in raising such concerns. They wondered if progress on improving water quality in their communities would be put on hold during a campaign for a new regional agency.

Everyone at the table, which in-

cluded Barnstable DPW Director Mark Ells and, in his role as president of the Barnstable Councilors and Selectmen's Association, Town Councilor Greg Milne, agreed that banding together in some fashion to seek state and federal funds for such activities was worthwhile.

At this week's meeting, county health and environment director George Heufelder said any regional

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collaborative "ought to emerge from the towns saying, 'We really want this thing.'"

The role of the Business Round Table of the Association to Protect Cape Cod in moving the matter forward drew comments from some members. Alternate John Hodgkinson, the Assembly of Delegates member from Orleans who has made wastewater treatment one of his priorities, said it was time for the Round Table's "pronouncements to go into the closet for a while."

That suits the moderator of the Round Table, Cape Cod Five Cents

Savings Bank President Elliott Carr, who said in an interview that, "The ball is clearly in the Blue Ribbon Committee's court. If they get it done, that's magnificent. If they fail, it further establishes the need."

Maggie Geist, executive director of APCC, could not attend this week's committee meeting due to a speaking conflict. "I think that's wise," she said when told of the committee's consensus that a 2005 referendum was preferable to one this year.

"We do not have a concrete plan to bring forward to the people of the region," she said. "An additional year gives us the necessary time to fill in

the blanks and answer all the questions and hear back from all the people on the Cape."

For now, the committee is concentrating on nailing down a mission statement from which goals and strategies will emerge. Leading the effort write the statement (might it be called a declaration of interdependence?) is Mark Ells, DPW director for Barnstable.

The committee will hold a working session on the mission statement Feb. 17 at 7:30 a.m. in Rooms 11 and 12 at Barnstable Superior Court House. its next regular meeting is in the same location at the same time on Feb. 25.