

## **A glimpse of our coastal problem**

Wednesday night, the final report on the Massachusetts Estuaries program in Barnstable's Three Bay Area will be presented at a public hearing at Barnstable Town Hall.

The report will not be revelatory, as the nutrient problems in the Three Bay Area are well documented.

It will serve as confirmation and a solid steppingstone for what to do next.

The Three Bays report quantifies just how overloaded the system is with nutrients and how much will need to be removed in some fashion to reach the desired health goals for the system.

The Town of Barnstable is just closing off 14 years worth of work on a wastewater facilities plan. That plan was a requirement of federal sewer grants, accepted when such things were available, and will allow some expansion of the Water Pollution Control Facility in Hyannis. What it doesn't address is the majority of the town not connected to the sewer system. That's the next step.

Unfortunately, the grants that made construction of the Hyannis plant so convenient and cheaper to the ratepayers – 90 percent federal share, 7 percent state and 3 percent local match – are long gone.

Whatever solutions are deemed necessary for the western part of town will come on the backs of residents. There remains some hope of leveraging some assistance through the still-formative regional water protection collaborative, but don't expect any windfalls.

The good news out of an earlier Estuaries Project report, that one for the nearby Popponessett Bay, is that a suggested remedy to increasingly nutrient-rich waters was wetland restoration, not wastewater plant construction, at least not entirely. The method involves intercepting the primary surface sources of nitrogen with reconstructed wetlands that can absorb (the scientific term is attenuation) and efficiently remove a good amount of nitrogen.

That doesn't mean something shouldn't be done with the homes with failing septic systems, but it does mean that it's

possible to get the overall ecosystem into balance without industrial-sized solutions, both in appearance and cost.

Wednesday's meeting begins at 7 p.m. and will be broadcast on town channel 18. Tune in or attend. The concepts for improving the Three Bays area will become familiar in the coming years as the town and the rest of Cape Cod try to figure out just what to do about it.

DS II

[editor@barnstablepatriot.com](mailto:editor@barnstablepatriot.com)