

Future without sewerage: Not pretty

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ORLEANS - Approximately 40 percent of Orleans homes will need additional wastewater treatment, largely sewerage, to protect coastal water quality, according to a wastewater management report by the town's environmental engineering consultants, Wright-Pierce.

The numbers in the report don't paint a pretty picture. With 11 percent of residential lots and 22 percent of commercial lots still undeveloped, there is the potential for 36 percent to 84 percent possible increase in wastewater generation with development under current zoning laws.

It's even more grim for bottom-living animals and plants along parts of the Orleans shoreline. Shallow, nearly enclosed, tidal ponds like Areys or Paw Wah ponds are particularly vulnerable to nitrogen from septic systems which fuels the explosive growth of algae to the point where their natural respiration and decompositions deprives the water of oxygen. Animals and plants on the bottom in these ponds die off and they become barren wastelands.

Orleans town officials, who commissioned the report as part of a comprehensive wastewater management plan, want residents to attend an informational meeting Monday to comment on whether possible solutions are worth the money.

If other towns are any yardstick, it won't be inexpensive to resolve the problem, Chatham has already estimated it will cost \$300 million to sewer the rest of the town, and Falmouth has projected a cost of \$500 million.

"The driving force behind funding (this wastewater plan)," said Town Planner George Meservey, "is that protection of marine estuaries has reached a critical point where we need to stop further degradation now."

The wastewater plan is expected to be complete and ready for town meeting approval in 2008. It will help the town comply with the state and federal mandate under the Clean Water Act that all coastal waters be fishable, swimmable and capable of supporting marine life.

Three or four more public hearings are expected to be held over the next year as the wastewater plan continues to develop and focuses in on solutions, such as

where to locate wastewater treatment facilities.

To protect saltwater estuaries, 1,900 homes may need additional treatment, largely sewerage, that goes beyond what is provided by individual septic systems. With 63 freshwater ponds, including eight "great" ponds, Orleans must also look at 77 lots adjacent to those water bodies. Since phosphorous is the major worry in freshwater, limiting lawn fertilizers and storm water run-off will be a primary consideration.

The meeting will be held from 6:30-8:30 p.m. Monday at Snow Library in Orleans.

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