



Search

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Home

News

Halloween Contest

Town Notes

County Clippings

Classroom Rambles

Political Potpourri

This Just In...

People

Obituaries

Early Files

Legals

Automotive

Villages

News Archives

Photo Gallery

Patriot File Uploader

Story Search

Sports

Sports Archives

Classifieds

Place an Ad

Search Ads

Business

Business Archives

Arts & Living

A & E Lighthouse

Dining Around

Crossword Puzzle

HomeScape

HealthScape

Events

Religious

Senior Sense

Arts/Living Archives

Opinion

Editorials

Letters To The Patriot

NEWS

[Return To News](#)

Wastewater remains a moving target

Town makes its case for sewer expansion

By Edward F. Maroney

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In the Peanuts strip, Lucy always snatches the football just before Charlie Brown can kick it. When it comes to wastewater planning, it's the goalposts that keep being moved.

That's not to say that regulators have an evil glint in their eyes whenever Barnstable steps up to the tee with a treatment plan. It's just that the fund of knowledge, about both aggressive management plans and potential dangers to the environment, keeps growing.

Tuesday night, the town presented the third and last phase of its 20-year wastewater facilities planning project during a Cape Cod Commission hearing held at town hall. Department of Public Works Director Mark Ells was the point man, speaking to a commission subcommittee that included county commissioner Bill Doherty and Cape Cod Commission members Elizabeth Taylor of Brewster and Roy Richardson of Barnstable.

Ells said the town wants to add 5,460 sewer system customers, 90 percent of them residential, and increase utilization of the Hyannis Water Pollution Control Facility from 2.5 million gallons per day of wastewater to its capacity of 4.2 million.

There are 3,300 residential and a thousand commercial properties on the system already.

More than a decade of planning that began with a needs assessment identified areas of concern ranging from failed Title

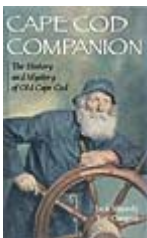
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Opinion Archives

Real Estate

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5 septic systems to protection of drinking water supplies and other natural resources as well as accommodation of development.

Ells said a multi-year effluent (treated wastewater) mitigation program culminated this year with a rare opportunity to study high groundwater levels at the treatment plant on Bearse's Way (remember the endless heavy rain?) during peak summer use and discharge. The news was good, he said.

The town wants to move ahead with sewerage areas of concern such as Lake Wequaquet, Red Lily Pond, Stewart's Creek, Hall's Creek, and several more. Locations outside the areas of concern will wait until data from the Massachusetts Estuaries Project, which will set nitrogen-loading limits, has been assimilated, probably within the next five to eight years.

But preliminary versions of those data are available now, the Cape Cod Commission staff review of the town's application made clear.

"...a draft of the Centerville River technical report was delivered to MassDEP (Department of Environmental Protection) in June, while a draft Lewis Bay report might be available prior to the completion of a Final Plan/FEIR (Final Environmental Impact Report)," the staff commented.

Moving the goalposts? Overall, the staff is very supportive of the town's wastewater handling plans, including its proposed Adaptive Management Plan to monitor water levels and mitigate any adverse effects of effluent in the ecosystem. Commission staff recommends, however, "a more refined review of available data (near the Hyannis plant) is justified now rather than later," and offers its assistance.

Commission staff wants more detail about future costs also, noting that "the sewer extension will serve 5,468 properties for an average per property cost of \$29,078; the per-property cost within each AOC (Area of Concern) is expected to range between \$14,000 and \$51,000... It remains unclear whether these (costs) will be 100 percent betterments or whether some portion of the cost will be addressed through general revenues."

At press time, Ells and his colleagues were reviewing the staff's comments with an eye toward another commission subcommittee meeting Tuesday at 11 a.m. at the commission office on Route 6A in Barnstable Village.

Edward F. Maroney is Associate Editor of The Barnstable Patriot.

[Return To News](#)

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