

Orleans unveils wastewater report

By Matt Belson

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Orleans residents had an opportunity to learn about the first phase of a comprehensive town-wide wastewater management plan at a public information session held at Snow Library Monday.

Presented at the session was the needs assessment report that maps each lot in town and will aid in determining which neighborhoods should be connected to a sewer system or alternative nitrogen-removing system to reduce nitrogen pollution in the coastal embayment and groundwater.

“Every one of us with a Title 5 septic system or cesspool contributes to this problem whether you are three miles from the shore or right on the shore,” said Orleans Selectman John Hinckley. “That’s the bad news. The good news is we can be part of the solution.”

The report, prepared by Wright-Pierce, the consultants hired by the town, stated 80 percent of the nitrogen going into Pleasant

Bay needs to be removed. To reduce this flow of nitrogen, wastewater from 2,600 properties in Orleans (about 56 percent of all developed lots in town) will need to be transported off-site for treatment. The results of studies to determine the amount of nitrogen that needs to be removed from the Nauset Marsh and Cape Cod Bay sections of town are pending.

Failure to address the impact of nitrogen pollution could be catastrophic, and the degradation of the estuaries will continue and could lead to reduced fishing, wildlife habitat and decline in property values, the report said.

Additionally, if Orleans fails to implement a nitrogen wastewater management plan, the state Department of Environmental Protection could issue legal and financial penalties.

Augusta McKusick, chairwoman of the wastewater management steering committee, was pleased with the attendance at the meeting and that citizens of the town understand the need for taking care of wastewater.

“There was a real sense of ‘Let’s get going,’” said McKusick.

Monday’s meeting was the first of four public workshops.

McKusick said the next phase will look at least 10 alternative wastewater solutions for town. Going forward, the choices will be narrowed.

“When we get to looking at two or three plans, we will be able to give a better idea of costs,” said McKusick, adding it was premature to start estimating the cost to implement a wastewater management plan.