

Public input 'key' to wastewater plan success

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HARWICH -

If Frank Sampson has his way, CWMP will become a household acronym in Harwich.

It stands for Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan, which is the strategy now being created to guide Harwich through the process of determining how best to cope with the town's present and future needs. The greatest challenge, studies show, is nitrogen overloads that are affecting estuaries and harbors. Nitrogen is derived mostly from septic systems.

Annual town meeting last May overwhelmingly approved the allocation of \$500,000 to fund the plan, which is being supervised by the environmental consulting firm Camp Dresser & McKee, headquartered in Cambridge. Sampson, who is chairman of the Harwich Wastewater Management Subcommittee, detailed the plan to about 40 people who attended the first of eight public meetings planned through spring of 2009.

"This isn't 'our' plan. It's 'your' plan," Sampson told the group that had assembled last Thursday at the community center, "and it's important that the community be very involved in this."

Selectmen Ed McManus and Larry Cole were in attendance; they will oversee interviewing candidates to serve on a newly created citizens advisory committee, designed to aid in disseminating information about the wastewater plan.

Candidates are needed, McManus said.

"This committee will help provide input to the water quality task force and help get the word out to folks in the community," said McManus, who added that no technical experience in the field of wastewater is necessary.

"We're looking for community-minded people," he said. McManus, who also is board of selectmen liaison to the subcommittee, said anyone interested should contact the selectmen's office at town hall, at 508-430-7513.

The goal of the CWMP, Sampson explained, is five-fold:

- * Develop a dynamic and formal program for wastewater and nitrogen management.

- * Preserve water resources.

- * Address the Massachusetts Estuaries Project nitrogen reduction goals.

- * Meet Department of Environmental Protection requirements to address nitrogen issues.

- * Provide for "smart," or planned growth, such as the village centers initiative now active in East Harwich.

The plan will be carried out in two phases. By the end of Phase 1, slated for next summer, the scientific data will have been vetted and a needs assessment completed, among other things. Phase 2 will tackle treatment system alternatives, financial costs and options, and the drafting of an implementation program.

The full plan can be found online at www.hwqtf.com, and copies are being provided to Brooks Free Library.

Following Thursday's presentation, which also featured CDM's team leader David Young, Sampson took questions from the audience.

Attendees asked why nitrogen is a problem, and how much of a problem it is, and about estimated costs for wastewater management systems.

In some water resources, such as Pleasant Bay, Sampson said, nitrogen levels are "way over the limit." In others, such as the harbors, levels are increasing and are affecting water quality. He said there's not even a ballpark figure of costs yet, and there won't be until determinations are made about what needs to be done in various parts of town.

The next public meeting is Nov. 15 at the community center.