



TOWN OF EAST HAMPTON

159 Pantigo Road
East Hampton, New York 11937

A COMMUNITY WASTEWATER TREATMENT SYSTEM FOR MONTAUK : Frequently Asked Questions

What is a centralized community wastewater system and how does it work?

In a centralized wastewater system, sanitary waste (sewage) is collected from properties within a designated sewer district and piped to a site where it can be treated to remove contaminants. This centralized system is used in lieu of separate cesspools or septic systems on individual properties.

The system proposed for Montauk would be built in phases, with the first sewer district comprising properties in the downtown Montauk area.

In subsequent phases, other high-density areas around the Montauk docks, the Long Island Rail Road station, and Ditch Plains could be hooked up to the community wastewater system.

A committee made up of Montauk residents, nonprofit representatives, business owners, and town staff and officials has been meeting to address the Montauk wastewater issue, and information has been presented at Town Board meetings and to the Montauk Citizens Advisory Committee.

Why does Montauk need a centralized community wastewater system?

- Older cesspools and traditional septic systems do not treat wastewater for nutrients or bacteria, and release effluent that can pollute ground and surface waters and threaten our health and safety
- Numerous studies and reports, as well as ongoing water testing, document pollution impacts to Montauk ground and surface waters, which are directly correlated to insufficient and failing septic infrastructure within the tributary areas for water bodies such as Fort Pond and the Atlantic Ocean.
- Fort Pond, Fort Pond Bay, and Lake Montauk have all been deemed “partially impaired” water bodies according to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation. The Federal Clean Water Act requires states to identify impaired waters that don’t meet water quality standards and to take steps to reduce the pollution affecting them.

- While individual low-nitrogen septic systems (so-called IA, or ‘innovative/alternative’ systems) are effective at reducing the polluting nitrogen in effluent that is released into the environment, they can only be installed on properties of adequate size

Is this a new issue?

- No. The Town of East Hampton has commissioned studies in the past to evaluate the economic growth, environmental protection, and potential sewerage of the Montauk area. These include:
 - Wastewater Needs Analysis Report (2014)
 - Lake Montauk Watershed Protection Plan (2014)
 - Comprehensive Town-wide Wastewater Management Plan (2015)
 - Water Quality Improvement Plan (2016)
 - Downtown Montauk Wastewater Management Strategic Plan (2017)
 - Other Regional Studies including Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan (LINAP) and Suffolk County Water Resources Plan
- All studies outline the need for better wastewater treatment throughout the Town with a focus on Montauk for a centralized system.

Why focus first on the Montauk downtown area?

- Wastewater flow and property size constraints in the densely developed downtown Montauk area limits the use of onsite treatment or low-nitrogen I/A septic systems
- A number of existing systems at businesses do not meet current standards or comply with federal, state, and county regulations and would be defined as “failing” by the County Health Department. Many businesses must have their septic systems pumped out regularly, and smells and sewage can and do escape
- A high groundwater level in Montauk, especially near the coast, leaves limited area between the land surface and the groundwater to install a septic system. Rising water levels due to climate change exacerbate this issue
- The amount of sewage flow from the densely developed downtown area exceeds what is currently allowed by the Suffolk County Health Department
 - The Health Dept. maximum is 600 gallons of sewage per day, per acre, or a total of 48,396 gallons per day in the 80-acre downtown district
 - The actual sewage flow in downtown Montauk is 2,154 gallons per acre, or 173,720 gallons per day in the downtown area – 3.5 times the Health Dept. maximum

Where will the sewage go and how will it be treated?

- Collected waste will be piped to a sewage treatment plant where it will be treated to remove contaminants before the resulting effluent is discharged.
- Criteria used to evaluate possible locations for the treatment plant include:
 - Distance from proposed sewer service area(s)
 - Available area/ usable space
 - Proximity to residential properties and adherence to Suffolk County Health Department required setbacks and buffers from adjacent properties
 - Proximity to public Suffolk County Water Authority drinking water wells
 - Depth to groundwater
 - Flood zone
 - Existence of underground structures or utilities
 - Property ownership and use restrictions
- For the currently proposed downtown Montauk sewer district, and to allow for future 100-percent expansion to include additional sewer district areas, a minimum of 14 acres is required
 - All Montauk parcels of minimum size, both public or privately owned, have been evaluated according to the criteria
 - Several possible alternatives were closely examined but were ultimately found not feasible and were eliminated (Siting at the Town of East Hampton landfill property, the NYS right of way along Montauk Highway, or the LIRR station area; expanding and joining the existing treatment system at Montauk Manor, and re-using treated effluent at the Montauk Downs Golf Course)
- A 14-acre portion of a County-owned property adjacent to the Town's former landfill and current Montauk recycling center has been identified as the remaining viable possible site for the wastewater treatment plant
 - To obtain this site, East Hampton has proposed a land swap with Suffolk County, and would provide to the County a recently purchased 18.8-acre parcel on East Lake Drive that is adjacent to the Theodore Roosevelt County Park, and would become County parkland
 - County Park Commissioners, the County Legislature, and the NYS Legislature would have to approve a "parkland alienation" of the 14 acres to enable the transfer of the potential wastewater treatment site to East Hampton Town

Will the treatment plant negatively impact the environment or our drinking water?

- The proposed site for the treatment plant meets all Suffolk County Health Department regulations, setbacks, and buffer zones, including maximum distance from residences
- The treated sewage effluent emitted from the plant will meet the drinking water standard of including less than 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L) of nitrogen. This is cleaner than what is emitted from the septic systems at individual residences, including the new low-nitrogen systems, which must meet a maximum 19 milligrams per liter of nitrogen standard
- The proposed location of the plant is north of a groundwater divide, meaning underground water flow from the site is north, away from residences
- The wastewater treatment system will improve and protect the environment and groundwater quality by removing failed or substandard septic systems from flood-prone, low-lying areas

Will having a wastewater treatment system allow increased development in Montauk?

- East Hampton Town zoning laws will continue to govern what can be developed and where.
- Town zoning allows for affordable apartments over commercial buildings, but some downtown property owners have not been able to obtain County Health Department approval for them due to sewage/ septic system flow limits. In these cases hooking up to the community wastewater system would allow for the creation of this much-needed affordable housing
- The wastewater treatment plant will be sized to accommodate the development currently allowed under town zoning

How will we pay for the community wastewater system?

- The cost will be estimated as engineering, design, and construction plans are developed.
- The Town of East Hampton will pursue state and federal grants and loans to finance up to 90 percent of the community wastewater system's engineering and installation costs. Some Community Preservation Fund (CPF) Water Quality Improvement funds could be used as well.
- Property owners within the sewer service area, once a sewer district is approved, will contribute to the ongoing operation and maintenance costs of the sewage treatment facility. Pursuant to the legal formation of a sewer district, there are several options as to

how fees will be determined. The Town will engage with all sewer district property owners as we advance the process.

What happens if coastal policy calling for eventual retreat from the coastline is enacted and downtown business development is moved out of the coastal flood zone?

- Once the community wastewater collection system and treatment plant is set up, it is simply a matter of removing, moving, or adding new underground pipes to disconnect or connect a particular site.
- If development in one sewer district area is curtailed, it will free up capacity to hook new properties up to the wastewater system.

What's next?

- East Hampton Town's request for County land is being evaluated.
- Once the treatment site is procured, the town's consulting engineering firm, H2M, will finalize a "Map and Plan" for the proposed sewer district
- H2M will develop design and engineering specifications for the system and treatment plant; Town of East Hampton will begin legal procedures for the formation of a sewer district
- Information will be presented to the public at Town Board work sessions and be posted to the town website at <http://ehamptonny.gov/> . Presentations will be made to community groups such as the Citizens Advisory Committee to provide updates as the planning process continues.
- Mandated environmental review under State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) to be conducted by Suffolk County and the Town consistent with the statute