

CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE

TO THE SOUTH SHORE ESTUARY RESERVE COUNCIL

Draft CAC Meeting Minutes

January 11, 2022

7:00-8:30 p.m.

Virtual Meeting via Zoom

Present:

Maureen Dolan Murphy, Citizens Campaign for the Environment/Chair CAC
Rob Weltner, Operation SPLASH/Vice-Chair CAC
Jeremy Campbell, NYS DOS/Reserve Coordinator
Judi Bird, League of Women Voters Brookhaven
George Costa, Trout Unlimited/Art Flick Chapter
Dorian Dale, Suffolk County
Alli DePerte, Atlantic Marine Conservation Society (AMCS)
Maureen Dunn, Seatuck Environmental Association
Adrienne Esposito, Citizens Campaign for the Environment
Kathleen Fallon, Co-Chair TAC/NY Sea Grant
Steve Fuoco,
Suzy Goldhirsch, Fire Island Association
Lesley Kane, Islip Town Lease Holders Association
Sally Kellogg, NYS DOS/Reserve Office
Artie Kopelman, Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island (CRESLI)
Bob Mozer, Speonk Remsenburg Civic Association
Lou Siegel, NYS Marine Education Association
Lane Smith, NY Sea Grant
Robyn Silvestri, Save the Great South Bay
Pete Topping, Peconic Baykeeper

1. Introductions

M. Dolan Murphy called the meeting to order at 7:03 p.m. Introductions were made.

2. Funding Opportunities for SSER

M. Dolan Murphy described potential funding sources for SSER projects. Through the federal Infrastructure bill \$6 billion was allocated for New York State for water infrastructure projects. Additional funding could come from the Build Back Better Act but it has not yet passed. Governor Hochul proposed a \$4 billion Bond Act which will be on the ballot in November 2022. Member groups are advocating the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) to be increased to \$500 million, historically EPF has been funded at \$300 million. With a \$500 million EPF, members of the CAC are advocating for the SSER line item to be increased to \$5 million. SSER is currently funded at \$900,000 per year. The governor's budget comes out January 15th.

3. Dorian Dale, Suffolk County

D. Dale described that untreated wastewater is major issue for Suffolk County. Some strategies Suffolk County is using to address this issue include innovative/advanced on-site wastewater treatment systems and sewer infrastructure projects. Large parts of the southwestern portion of the County are already sewered. Sewer expansion projects (within the SSER) that are scheduled or have already begun in: Westhampton Beach, Babylon, Mastic Beach, Patchogue, and more. Sewer funds are primarily from Superstorm Sandy Recovery efforts with the goal of saving wetlands by reducing nitrogen loading from wastewater, during the storm the wetlands helped protect the uplands. Mastic and Babylon approved sewer construction via referendum in 2019, Great River funding went to Oakdale after Great River residents rejected the proposition.

Suffolk County completed Bergen Point outfall bay wastewater-pipeline upgrade project; the pipe had been on the brink of imminent failure before the upgrades were made. The Bergen Point resilience and expansion is also helping to protect the facility in the face of storms and to remove more excess nitrogen by enhancing capacity and adding 85,000 new connections. Suffolk County is in the process of implementing a countywide wastewater management district (CWMD). A comprehensive water management plan was created, the septic improvement plan, and the subwatershed wastewater plan are all a part of this effort. Currently, the draft legislation authorizing the establishment of the CWMD is being finalized. Next steps including the adoption of home use message by Suffolk County legislature, approval by New York State authorizing the legislation and a referendum authoring the establishment of the CWMD. The CWMD will create a structure to manage the county subwatershed wastewater plan, prioritize updating of properties that currently don't treat wastewater, spur local job growth through the post-pandemic recovery by establishing a stable and recurring revenue stream, and rationalize and harmonize the rate and operation of the County's 26 sewer districts. See slides for additional details.

Question: What is the estimated cost per user?

Answer: \$5 per month per parcel.

4. SSER Draft CMP

J. Campbell reminded members that comments were due by December 6, 2021. He also noted that most comments were positive, and that he is currently putting together responses to comments.

M. Dolan Murphy thanked DOS for addressing comments made in 2012 during the scoping process by the CAC. Major topics of concern included but are not limited to marine debris and plastics reduction, restoration initiatives, and the Bay Park Conveyance project.

J. Campbell thanked all CAC members for submitting comments.

Comment: In the original CMP, the Bay houses were encouraged to be preserved in perpetuity, but the current draft no longer comments on this.

Response: J. Campbell will review the draft CMP.

Question: Can money for composting toilets be made available for bay houses?

Response: D. Dale would look at the County level and J. Campbell would look at state funding mechanisms.

5. Jeremy Campbell, South Shore Estuary Reserve Office

J. Campbell noted that Rachel Neville is on leave through May and noted the new TAC chair, Tara Schneider-Moran, and new co-chair, Kathleen Fallon, Ph.D. He also thanks the past TAC chair and co-chair for their leadership. The CAC was informed of the recently completed SSER grants: the Brookhaven eelgrass restoration project and Nassau County waterchestnut harvesting project where 150 cubic yards of material was taken from Mill Pond in Wantagh.

6. SSER Updates

In 2018 The Coalition for Fire Island Wastewater Solutions was formed 4 years ago with the purpose of identifying a comprehensive approach to wastewater management on Fire Island. The Coalition is made up of a diverse group of stakeholders ranging from government entities at all levels, nonprofit organizations, and other interested entities. Currently there is only one sewage treatment plant located on Fire Island, located in Ocean Beach. According to USGS, 80% of septic systems on Fire Island drain to the SSER which is 6% of the Nitrogen load to the Great South Bay. Suffolk County approved funding for a Fire Island Wastewater Solutions Planning and Engineering study which will assess conditions and identify potential solutions. This study will complement the Suffolk County Subwatersheds plan and should be complete by November 2023. D. Dale noted that 4,000 homes on Fire Island will be elevated pursuant to findings from Fire Island to Montauk Point project. Suffolk County is putting together a working group to identify whether the elevated homes should be required to have I/A systems included in the updated code. If the federal government requires this code change then funding mechanisms may be available for installation.

Comment: Fire Island Wastewater Solutions Planning and Engineering study is looking at elevation codes that work for Fire Island and the mainland. The groups should communicate and work together.

Browns River Dredging project. Stakeholders requested municipalities work together to get the Browns River dredged. The river is in dire need of dredging. There are 2 DEC designated disposal sites that currently exist, 1 has not been used in about 30 years but had been a historical dredge disposal site. Both sites are needed due the large amount of spoils that will be generated. To permit an additional site would disrupt the timeline for the project and DEC is unlikely to permit a new site in the area.

Comment: The site that has not been used in 30 years is a thriving red maple swamp forest ecosystem. There must be better alternatives to putting the waste in a healthy ecosystem.
Comment: There is no ideal place to put dredge spoils. Beneficial reuse is done well in New York State, but it takes a lot of planning and money. It is going to be difficult and a lengthy process to permit a new site and the Fire Island Ferry has run aground in the area.

Comment: One of the designated spoils site is an 8-acre ecosystem with blue heron, green heron, etc. which hasn't been used since the 1980s. Save the Great South Bay is in support of the project but asked the county to use an adjacent area that is dominated by invasive phragmites. This site is county owned. This would protect the wetland area.

Response: The adjacent area is not currently permitted for spoils and the permitting process would not be complete before the project needs to begin. Additionally, the adjacent area will require additional processes on top of the DEC permit which would take 2 years. D. Dale stated Legislator Picarillo is convening a community taskforce to identify specific issues and other possible dredge disposal sites.

K. Fallon noted the next meeting in February and that the TAC is focusing on the seagrass action plan document.

7. Public Comment/Announcements

Lou Siegel - New York State Marine Education Association is hosting the national Conference in July 2022 at Hofstra University. It will be a hybrid format with a full in person schedule and virtual options.

Maureen Dunn – On January 17 from 12-3 Seatuck will be hosting a volunteer event for the Penataquit Creek grant.

George Costa – The Swan River fish ladder installation process has begun and alewife surveying will begin in March.

The meeting adjourned at 8:42 p.m.