

EDITORIALS

Springs School Needs A Boost

With expansion on the horizon and a defective septic system in the here and now, the Springs School should be a top priority when East Hampton Town decides which water quality improvement projects it will set in motion using revenues from the Community Preservation Fund for the first time this year.

Throughout the South Fork, school buildings have enormous septic tanks and cesspools, many of them old and some, like the system in Springs, that are failing. While Suffolk County health codes would require any new commercial property with the wastewater flow of a school to have a more advanced treatment system, school construction is regulated only by the State Education Department, which does not. Even the best systems tend to be simple repositories that allow nitrogen-laden wastewater to seep into the ground—even, as is the case in Springs, when the water bodies are close enough to be in view.

At the moment, the school's cesspool, which serves more than 700 children, plus staff, has to be pumped at least every 10 days, and its overflows in heavy rains have raised the nitrogen levels in nearby Pussy's Pond, which is at the headwater of Accabonac Harbor. The Springs School's septic system is releasing wastewater laced with nitrogen at a level more than three times what Suffolk County says should be the limit for residential properties, according to Kevin McAllister, president of the water quality advocacy group Defend H2O, who visited the school on Friday.

The septic system will have to be relocated and replaced if and when the expansion moves forward, as the new part of the enlarged building would be sited where the old septic system lies now. District officials have expressed a willingness to put in a more advanced system than what the state would allow—if the district, historically the most cash-strapped of all the school districts in East Hampton Town, can come up with the money.

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oughly \$5.5 million should be available from CPF revenues this year for water quality improvement efforts

thanks to a referendum that allows up to 20 percent of CPF revenues to be used for such purposes. East Hampton's rebate program for homeowners who make residential septic improvements should be kicking in any day now, as will a similar residential rebate program offered by Suffolk County.

At first the focus in East Hampton Town will be to target residential properties in environmentally sensitive areas, such as Pussy's Pond and Accabonac Harbor, where the town has also targeted two projects of another sort—planting vegetation where Pussy's Pond flows into Accabonac Harbor to remove nitrogen, and replacing the aging, filled-in dry wells near Ashawagh Hall to filter road runoff before it reaches the harbor—that would seem to work hand-in-hand with a septic upgrade at the Springs School.

Schools may be “entire communities in one building” — the equivalent of hundreds of homes when it comes to the amount of wastewater they produce, as Mr. McAllister has noted. But that also means that updating their septic systems will have a comparably large impact, something that is harder to accomplish, more piecemeal, and more time-consuming, when dealing with individual homes.

Giving even one school a significant financial jolt from the CPF to improve water quality could produce the kind of dramatic results needed to really get the overall program on a roll. The Springs School should be next in line for a boost of its own from the CPF.