

Septic systems study

■ **Bellone wants to know** if property values impacted

■ **But foes say it's not up** to county to boost sales

BY RICK BRAND

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Forget the bathroom en suite, or the redoing the kitchen.

Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone wants to spend \$85,000 to learn whether high-tech septic systems will boost residential real estate values.

Sarah Lansdale, county planning director, said officials want to hire CoreLogic, a California-based company, to determine if the new septic systems could add to a home's sales potential.

"Right now there is no value assigned to sewer connections in appraising the value of a house, let alone more recently installed . . ." high-tech septic systems, said Lansdale, who called the study the first of its kind nationally. "The key will be presenting the value proposition to the homeowner."

The county is hoping the study can be used to convince the 360,000 homeowners in unsewered areas to install new septic systems, which can remove up to 70 percent of the nitrogen from wastewater.

The systems cost \$14,500 to \$17,500, compared with \$3,000 for conventional systems that do little to curb nitrogen pollution that damages lakes,



Suffolk County seeks to motivate 360,000 homeowners in unsewered areas to install cleaner systems.

streams and bays.

Builders also say such systems can require \$5,000 in design and permitting fees. Bellone has proposed a program to provide grants and loans of up to \$21,000, but an initial \$2 million is enough for only 400 homes.

Because there are so few of the new systems in Suffolk, the county is looking to compare sales in areas of Maryland and Rhode Island that "have developed robust septic upgrade programs," Lansdale said.

Lansdale said real estate officials in other areas say residents advertise such systems or connections to sewers, particularly in low-lying areas. Of-

ficials also say such systems can be designed to water lawns with wastewater.

"Right now we have anecdotal evidence there's a benefit; we'd like to have empirical evidence," Lansdale said.

Mitch Pally, executive director of the Long Island Builders Institute, said determining the added value of high-tech septic systems may be difficult in a county where the prime factor for home prices is the quality of local school districts.

"How do you determine this on top of that?" he asked.

Lansdale said funding for the study will come from a state Department of Environmental Conservation grant.

Paul Sabatino, an attorney who is suing Suffolk County on behalf of Southwest Sewer District residents who claim sewer taxes have been misspent, questioned whether the county can legally subsidize individual home septic systems or do studies to show economic benefit.

"It doesn't sound [like] legitimate government expenditure because the county is not in the business of marketing private properties to enhance their values," Sabatino said. "And it's totally unfair to people in sewer districts who are overtaxed, and those outside district who paid for their own septic systems at their own expense."

Hempstead board focuses on ethics reforms

BY JOHN ASBURY AND STEFANIE DAZIO

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Two Hempstead Town Board members yesterday called for ethics reforms and an inspector general's review of town contracts, but a vote on an emergency resolution for the proposal failed.

Councilman Bruce Blakeman proposed adding the resolution to yesterday's voting calendar to create an inspector general as an independent investigator to monitor waste, corruption and fraud in town government. The proposal was backed by Councilwoman Erin King Sweeney.

Town attorney Joe Ra said the vote was on adding the emergency resolution, not the merits of the motion. Blakeman said he would work with the town attorney to add the motion to a future agenda.

The push for an immediate vote was defeated 4-3. Supervisor Anthony Santino and council members Dorothy Goosby, Gary Hudes and Anthony D'Esposito voted down adding the motion. Blakeman, King Sweeney and Councilman Ed Ambrosino voted in favor of it.

Goosby said she voted against the measure because she was not able to review it in advance.

Santino's staff provided a written statement immediately after the vote, promoting the administration's open bids posted online, contract reviews and transparency.

The proposed inspector general would have included an annual salary of \$125,000 for two years. The office would start with a budget of \$250,000 and the appointment would require six of the seven votes on the town board.

King Sweeney abstained from voting on 13 resolutions after the motion was defeated, which all required the expenditure of town funds. She said she was abstaining

from votes while asking for a review of conflicts of interest in town contracts.

The legislation was introduced during the first meeting attended by Ambrosino since he was arrested last month on charges of income-tax evasion and wire fraud, though Blakeman said that did not prompt the proposal. Ambrosino's charges were unrelated to the town board.

Ambrosino declined to comment on the ethics reforms effort but spoke for the first time since Santino and Hudes asked him to step down.

"I'm not going anywhere," Ambrosino said yesterday.

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THIS DATE IN HISTORY

1607 English colonists went ashore at present-day Cape Henry, Virginia, to establish the first permanent English settlement in the Western Hemisphere.

1865 John Wilkes Booth, the assassin of President Abraham Lincoln, was surrounded by federal troops near Port Royal, Virginia, and killed.

1923 Britain's Prince Albert, Duke of York (the future King George VI), married Lady Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon at Westminster Abbey.

1952 The destroyer-minesweeper USS Hobson sank in the central Atlantic after colliding with the aircraft carrier USS Wasp with the loss of 176 crew members.

1964 The African nations of Tanganyika and Zanzibar merged to form Tanzania.

1972 The first Lockheed L-1011 TriStar went into commercial service with Eastern Airlines.

1986 An explosion and fire at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine caused radioactive fallout to begin spewing into the atmosphere.

2000 Vermont Gov. Howard Dean signed the nation's first bill allowing same-sex couples to form civil unions.