

# 311 call center opens

New line will let residents report common issues

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Suffolk County residents can now report potholes, downed lights and other concerns and get more efficient responses from government agencies by dialing 311, officials said Tuesday.

County Executive Steve Bellone, Police Commissioner Geraldine Hart and Smithtown Supervisor Ed Wehrheim appeared at a new call center to announce the official launch of 311, which centralizes calls for county services and complaints.

Suffolk is the first county in the state to add 311 call service, officials said. It is intended to cut down on thousands of non-emergency 911 calls, help speed and track service responses



Suffolk County Executive Steve Bellone at the new 311 call center. ■ Video: [newsday.com/suffolk](https://newsday.com/suffolk)

and help residents avoid the “runaround” when trying to contact officials.

“This is a terrific, terrific opportunity for us to remain laser-focused on the emer-

gency calls that we do receive and offload those non-emergency calls that can be handled properly by the 311 team,” Hart said.

Bellone said that since he an-

nounced plans for 311 last month, a team of six employees has answered about 50 to 100 calls a day in a test phase.

Operators can respond directly to calls about common

problems and log them into a computer program, which tracks responses, officials said.

Callers with more serious issues will be connected to the proper county department. Requests meant for other jurisdictions will be forwarded to the appropriate municipality, county officials said.

Bellone officially launched the service Tuesday by answering a call about a pothole from a cubicle in the H. Lee Dennison building in Hauppauge.

“Hello, Suffolk County, can I help you?” Bellone said in answering the call, which he turned over to a call center employee.

The 311 call center operates weekdays from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. After hours, residents can leave messages and have their calls returned the next day, officials said.

The county expects to launch a 311 website in about a month so residents can report issues and track responses online, they said.

## Landlord faces EPA fines over banned cesspools

BY NICHOLAS SPANGLER  
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A Kings Park commercial landlord faces up to \$286,586 in Environmental Protection Agency penalties for banned large-scale cesspools at his Main Street strip mall.

In a May 2 letter to landlord Frank Viteritti of Huntington, the EPA said March inspections of the building at the Pulaski Road intersection found that five of the six businesses there had cesspools but lacked wastewater treatment systems or septic tanks. An inspection report for Park Bake Shop noted it had cesspools but did not specify if it had treatment systems. Bakery owner Gabe Shtanko said he had a grease trap, equipment intended to capture grease and oils for separate disposal.

Most cesspools consist of buried concrete containers with open bottoms and perfo-

rated sides that store and drain wastewater. EPA classes nonresidential cesspools capable of serving more than 20 per day as large-capacity cesspools. They were ordered to be closed by 2005 under federal law.

The EPA “has been working with Suffolk County Department of Health to identify and eliminate large-capacity cesspools and we were informed of the property in Kings Park as part of this process,” an agency representative wrote in an email. Department of Health spokeswoman Grace Kelly-McGovern wrote in an email that regional pollution from “legacy nonconforming commercial sanitary systems” including cesspools is “much less significant” than pollution from residential systems. Nevertheless, she wrote, commercial pollution is “not negligible, and can be locally significant.”

Viteritti said his building had

not been modified since it was built 40 or 50 years ago. His tenants are required to pay for modifications under their leases, he said. Both he and his tenants would be hard-pressed to pay for construction of alternative disposal systems, he said. “If they impose that on my tenants, I’ll lose all my tenants.” He has hired a lawyer and an engineer to review the matter, he said.

“EPA is willing to provide the time needed to comply,” the representative wrote. The agency’s “primary objective is compliance with environmental regulations, not the collection of penalties.”

The letter said wastewater in cesspools can contain potentially dangerous substances, such as phosphates, chlorides, viruses and other chemicals.

“Cesspools are not designed to treat sanitary waste and cesspool wastewaters often contain higher levels of nitrates and coliform bacteria than are



Large-scale cesspools were found at this Kings Park strip mall.

permitted in drinking water,” the EPA representative wrote.

Downtown Kings Park is unserved, and Kings Park Chamber of Commerce president Tony Tanzi said he worried that other property owners could be exposed to penalties. “I would imagine there are other businesses on Main Street and all over Long Island” that have difficulty building EPA-sanctioned alternatives to cesspools, especially on downtown sites with little open space, he said.

Besides sewers, alternatives

to large-capacity cesspools include septic systems, holding tanks and small wastewater treatment systems known as package plants.

A long-awaited downtown sewer project has a \$20 million funding commitment from New York State but has stalled without legislative approval for Smithtown to transfer a piece of land to Suffolk County to build and run a critical pump station. Assemb. Fitzpatrick (R-St. James) and Steve Englebright (D-Setauket) have co-sponsored a bill to do that.