

TWO SEWER PLANS OK'd

Mastic, Babylon voters say yes; Great River, no

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Mastic and Babylon voters on Tuesday approved two sewer projects that will cover 6,500 homes, Suffolk's largest sewer expansion since the 1970s, while Great River voters rejected a measure to expand sewers into their community.

The \$360 million worth of approved sewer expansions will be using federal and state grants. Construction is expected to start next year.

"This is a major victory for water quality in Suffolk County," said Peter Scully, a deputy county executive under County Executive Steve Bellone.

The county would look at alternate ways to use the \$26.4 million proposed for the Great River project, he said.

Residents will have to pay an estimated annual sewer tax of about \$470 and \$532 for the Mastic and Babylon projects respectively. It would have been \$755 annually

for the Great River project.

Mastic voted 414-71 to accept \$191.3 million in federal and state grants, according to the Suffolk County Board of Elections. The project would pay to sewer nearly 2,770 residential parcels and businesses along the Forge River, including a commercial corridor along Montauk Highway, and construction of a new sewage treatment plant at Brookhaven Calabro Airport, according to the county.

In West Babylon, North Babylon and Wyandanch around the Carlls River, residents voted 612-85 to connect 2,847 homes at a cost of \$140.2 million in grants.

Voters in Great River, along the Connetquot River, voted 230-304 on the proposal that would have connected 474 parcels at a cost of \$26.4 million.

Apart from the referendums, grant money will be used to connect 1,500 homes within the existing Southwest Sewer District to the sewer system, and sewers would be extended to 300 homes in Patchogue Village.

About 9,500 voters were eligible to cast ballots, according to the board of elections. Cumulatively, voters approved the projects 1,256 to 460.

Federal and state grants, won

post-Sandy to improve the South Shore's storm resiliency by strengthening wetlands that absorb surges, will cover upfront costs. If costs come in higher than expected, though, the projects will go in front of the Suffolk County Legislature.

At a Great River community meeting last week, many homeowners were skeptical of the project's cost in an already high tax area, as well as the technology. Unlike a traditional sewer system that relies on gravity, the proposed systems would use electronic pumps to send waste through pipes to the Bergen Point Sewage Treatment Plant.

"A lot of us are for sewers, but not for this system," said Rich Llewellyn, 59 of Great River.

The cost for Great River residents also was more expensive than the other two, because of the higher home values there, county officials said.

An anonymous mailer was passed out against the sewers. It warned the county fee will increase each year, and that the costs are only projected.

County officials said they scheduled the vote in January, instead of November's election when turnout would have been higher, because the state only



A voter at the Mastic Fire Department on Tuesday casts a ballot on the proposed \$191.3 million sewer project along the Forge River.

agreed in July to convert a \$60 million loan into a grant, reducing the amount residents in those districts will have to pay back.

Only those residents who would be getting sewers, and have to pay, were eligible to vote.

At Mastic Fire House, Michael Knight, 47, a machine operator, voted no. He was unhappy with the annual cost, and also worried that sewer installations, involving electric-powered pumps at

every house, would damage driveways and yards. "This is a cash-strapped area already," he said.

Ute Ahrens, 58, said she voted in favor of the proposal.

"It's good for the environment," she said. She also liked the idea of coming off septic systems, which she would have to pay to replace if they fail. "If the darn things broke, I don't have to spend tens of thousands of dollars," she said.

Suffolk pushes to snuff out e-cigs in schools

BY JOIE TYRRELL
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Suffolk plans to partner with four school districts — using tools such as peer-to-peer counseling and parent forums — to stem the rising use of electronic cigarettes among young people, County Executive Steve Bellone said Tuesday.

The pilot program is a vaping prevention program to support school systems as they deal with students using e-cigarettes. Only those age 21 and over on Long Island can legally use e-cigarettes.

"The popularity of electronic cigarettes has exploded into mainstream culture to the point where school officials in Suffolk County have asked our public health officials for clarity and assistance in dealing with record numbers of students who are vaping on school grounds," Bellone said.

"Vape Out" will be piloted in the North Babylon, Hampton Bays, Port Jefferson and Bayport-Blue Point school districts. It is being funded through existing staff resources, the county said, at no cost to the schools.

The Suffolk Department of

Health Services staff worked with the schools to develop the program and will be at meetings, too. The first one will be Jan. 30.

E-cigarettes allow inhalation of an aerosol that usually contains the addictive drug nicotine, flavorings and other chemicals. While the battery-operated devices can resemble traditional tobacco cigarettes or cigars, many look like common items carried by students, such as pens or USB flash drives, which is particularly troublesome for school officials. Health officials have warned of the impact on young users who are attracted to the flavored nico-

tine sold in varieties such as cotton candy and fruit flavors.

A state Health Department survey released in March 2017 showed that use of "electronic nicotine delivery systems" among those of high school age nearly doubled from 2014 through 2016.

Vape Out will take a three-pronged approach to prevention: In the Teens-Teaching-Teens Peer Education Program, about 30 student volunteers will spend a day learning about vaping and how to talk to younger students about the dangers. The Alternative-to-Suspension Pro-

gram encourages school administrators to require students who have been reprimanded for vaping to attend a customized education intervention. The third part of Vape Out is community education.

Glen Eschbach, superintendent of the North Babylon school district, said educators noticed an increase in e-cigarette use among their students this academic year, both in high schools and middle schools, and contacted the health department for help. North Babylon is the first district to implement the program.