

Ben Baruch

Environmental Concerns about the Bay Park Conveyance Project

Nassau County is moving forward with the Bay Park Conveyance Project despite environmental concerns from Dr. Arthur Kopelman, president of the Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island, and from the project's environmental impact assessment.

The project aims to transport nitrogen-laced wastewater from the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant to an ocean outfall pipe at Cedar Creek Park. To get the water there, workers will restore a 100-year-old aqueduct under Sunrise Highway that will connect the two sites. As a result, the Bay Park facility will stop dumping wastewater from its outfall into the Western Bays.



The excess nitrogen that the Bay Park outfall dumped into the bay contributed to excess algae growth that has choked marine ecosystems. “[There’s] so much seaweed, you can’t even drop your [fishing] hook down,” an employee at Ted’s Fishing Station in Point Lookout said. The store is located on Reynolds Channel, where the existing Bay Park pipe releases effluent.

Although the project will only move the bad water somewhere else, Nassau County Deputy Commissioner Elisa Picca claimed the ocean can dilute the nitrogen on its own, meaning the project won't harm the ocean and nearby Jones Beach. She added the outfall pipe has a mile of dispensers so it doesn't dump everything in one spot.

Dr. Kopelman disagreed. While he acknowledged that the ocean can dilute small amounts of nitrogen, he said he fears it can't handle the over 50 million gallons of wastewater that the pipe would release.

"There's simply no way of knowing what will happen," he said. "I was concerned, because I didn't want to have the old story of 'the solution to pollution is dilution.'"

Dr. Kopelman said that although the project is important and necessary, the county could do more. "It can't be the sole solution but I think it's an important one," he said. Rather, he believes the county should implement a treatment system at Bay Park to further reduce the nitrogen concentration in the water. That way, far less nitrogen would enter the bay.

Still, FEMA's environmental impact assessment found that the added discharge of treated water from Bay Park into the ocean "would not be expected to result in a measurable change in water quality."

It also concluded that the result of the project will have no impact on aquatic life within the Western Bays or the Atlantic Ocean and that impacts in the vicinity of the outfall would be negligible.

Chris Fabris, a local resident and concerned bayman, pointed to Hurricane Sandy as proof that the ocean can clean itself. The October 2012 superstorm created an inlet south of Bellport that helped clean the Great South Bay and restore its marine life.

Dr. Kopelman said the Great South Bay is different from the Western Bays. He pointed out that the Western Bays are a more stagnant body of water, and the new inlet only helped the Great South Bay filter itself. Kopelman explained that the inlet acts like a two-way pump where the clean ocean water can balance the dirtier bay, as opposed to the one-way outfall.

The environmental impact assessment also raised land-based concerns about the project. It found that construction along Sunrise Highway will result in noise increases in surrounding neighborhoods. The noise will mostly stem from sheet piling, a construction technique that protects the construction site from cave-ins.

Construction will happen at night, and the excessive noise from the loud hammers will travel at least 250 feet away from the work area, potentially affecting thousands of homes around the highway. Picca said the county is conducting outreach campaigns to inform residents of the effects of the project, but the county has not identified any noise mitigation strategies yet.

But Fabris said the potential inconvenience is justified considering what he said he dealt with for the past 50 years. He said the nitrogen contaminated the water, which made clams and fish unsafe to eat. “We’ve been sacrificing in this neck of the woods,” he said.

Fabris also expressed concern that the Western Bays are “one major storm away from devastation.” Hurricane Sandy heavily damaged the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant, which further polluted the bay. He fears another storm could do the same, though he believes the new project will help prevent catastrophe.

Fabris is excited for a more vibrant, nitrogen-free bay. He claimed neighboring New Jersey’s bays have cleaner water because the state has more outfall pipes than Long Island. “When other states have multiple outflow pipes, why should our bays not have the same capabilities of coming back to life?” he asked.

The county actually looked into building a new outfall pipe from the Bay Park Sewage Treatment Facility directly to the ocean, which would've prevented the need for the county to connect it to Cedar Creek. However, Picca said it would have cost twice the price of the current project, and she claimed there was too much competition between states for ocean outfalls.

The tradeoff is a project that will increase traffic along Sunrise Highway. Four of the highway's six lanes will remain open during the day amidst construction and only one in each direction at night, according to the assessment. The work will also temporarily remove on-street parking in the work area, but won't significantly affect off-street parking in shopping centers.

The environmental impact assessment expects construction to take about seven weeks and three days for each portion of the project, though Picca expects it to be closer to 9-12 weeks. The entire project will take about three years to complete.

Last week, the Nassau County legislature unanimously approved the construction contract with Western Bays Constructors. The county comptroller, the county Finance Control Board, and County Executive Laura Curran all need to approve the project before construction can begin. The project is on schedule to break ground in spring 2021.

Sources:

Ted's Fishing Station: 516-431-4193, Friday 11/20 at 9:35 a.m.

Dr. Arthur Kopelman: president@cresli.org, Zoom call on Tuesday, 12/1 at 5:00 p.m.

Elisa Picca: 516-571-9600, Monday 11/23 at 10:53 a.m.

Chris Fabris: Facebook messenger, Monday 11/23 at 11:21 p.m. His phone number is 516-343-5747 and I called him 11/24 at 11:00 a.m.

Environmental Impact Assessment: <https://www.bayparkconveyance.org/nepa-ea>. Accessed 11/23 at 8:04 a.m.

Link for the picture of the Bay Park Conveyance Project:

<https://www.google.com/url?sa=i&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.liherald.com%2Fstories%2Fbay-park-plan-moves-ahead-despite-crisis%2C125415&psig=AOvVaw1L9YhoLqoFr3mbaNvYv1QJ&ust=1607086598513000&source=images&cd=vfe&ved=0CAIQjRxqFwoTCMCiyqHuse0CFQAAAAAdAAAAABAD>. Accessed 12/4 at 8:04 a.m.