

Harwich Wastewater Plan Gets Full Support Of Commission Subcommittee Cape Cod Chronicle 03 August 2016

HARWICH — The Cape Cod Commission subcommittee sitting on the development of regional impact application for the Harwich Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan unanimously voted on Thursday to recommend adoption of the plan to the full commission.

The full commission is scheduled to act on the recommendation in a hearing on Aug. 18 in Barnstable. Thursday's hearing was the second time in three months the subcommittee has examined the documents. The first came when conducting a Single Environmental Impact Report review in April as required under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act, which led to the issuance of a certificate of approval from Secretary of Energy and Environmental Affairs Matthew Beaton in May.

The town's consultant, David Young of CDM Smith, Inc., provided the subcommittee with an overview of the plan, which focuses on addressing high nitrogen and phosphorus levels which degrade marine waters and freshwater ponds. Young pointed out a 400 percent population increase between 1950 and 2000 is driving the degradation problems, and 85 percent is caused by wastewater.

He cited the need to reduce nitrogen in the five watersheds in Harwich, ranging from 58 to 100 percent. Citing unhealthy conditions caused by excessive phosphorus in ponds, particularly Hinckley's and Seymour's ponds in Pleasant Lake, Young spoke to the need for alum treatment and sewerage in and around some freshwater bodies.

He cited the eight phases of a plan that could cost between \$180 and \$230 million to implement over a 40-year period. He cited early accomplishments, such as the Muddy Creek Bridge reconstruction, which has increased tidal flow as a means of reducing nitrogen build-up.

He also cited negotiations between Harwich and Chatham officials relating to treatment of wastewater from East Harwich at the Chatham treatment plant. Young also spoke of community discussions about zoning changes in East Harwich, citing potential development reductions from original draft documents calling for 500,000 square feet of commercial space and 250 dwelling units 200 units and 250,000 square feet of commercial space.

Young also cited the community partnership options under discussion with Dennis and Yarmouth, which would be 15 years out in the Harwich plan, that could result in one treatment plant for the three towns, located in Dennis, and recharge sites in each community. The CWMP proposes a treatment plant be developed at the former town landfill site off Queen Anne Road in phase four, but Young emphasized this is an adaptive plan and adjustments will be made along the way.

Cape Cod Commission Chief Regulatory Officer Jonathan Idman said the staff has found that Harwich's plan meets the development of regional impact and 208 Plan Update overall goals. He cited the need for the commission to set conditions and provide review of the plan going forward, establishing benchmarks where reviews would be required. He said as the town comes forward with particular projects, the commission needs the ability to review and conduct impact analysis.

But he said there is no reason to open a DRI hearing for each individual project. Idman said there would be a need for review as the town enters phase four when it would be proposing to build the treatment plant or utilize other adaptive management methods. That would be a good time to reassess 208 compliance, Idman said.

"A major modification can be accommodated through adaptive management, but some might require DRI adjustments," Idman said.

Commission members had several questions about controlling growth and reducing build-out. There were also questions about the absence of a fertilizer control bylaw and the town's plan to educate residents to fertilizer use.

Chatham commission member Michael Skelley said the bottom line is Harwich residents have to buy into the plan.

"If you don't do the political side of it they're dead," Skelley said. He said the commission does not get involved in that side and it is important to help the town get the money approved to go through the phases.

"We have to find a way to bring it down to a palatable situation for the town to vote on this," Skelley said.

Orleans commission member Leonard Short said his town has been working at it for 20 years and he does not know if they will ever have a plant. He pointed out it came six votes short of a two-thirds majority vote for funding.

He cited a split vote between a four member board of selectmen after the fifth member resigned.

"This is what you are heading into unless you educate the public," Short said.

Harwich has provided funds for an outreach consultant to assist with educating residents. Short said Orleans has a consensus group and they have hired a consultant. "We have the support of non-residents," Short said. "It's the voters we don't have the support from."

During the public comment period, Don Keeran, assistant director of the Association to Preserve Cape Cod, cited a USGS study examining sea level rise. The south side of Harwich along Nantucket Sound is likely to experience sea level rise, he said, urging the town to examine what impact that will have on septic systems. He also recommended a conservative approach in growth management.

Commission subcommittee chairman Richard Roy said a lot of public outreach has been done with the plan. "It's important to push these projects, particularly when you get a good plan like this," Roy said. He accepted a motion to approve the DRI subject to conditions and forward it to the full commission. It was voted unanimously.