

HARWICH — As the community preservation committee begins deliberations on requests for funding, Hinckley's Pond has become a major focal point. Water quality issues in the Herring River headwaters pond have residents there concerned.

"Hinckley's Pond is the upward expression of the Monomoy lens," Stanley Selkow, co-president of the Hinckley's Pond Association, said this week. He was referring to the groundwater that provides drinking water to the towns of Harwich, Chatham, Dennis, Brewster and Orleans.

Selkow cited the Hinckley's Pond Evaluation conducted in 2012 by CDM Smith, Inc., the town's environmental consultants on the comprehensive wastewater management plan, citing cyanobacterial blooms that have occurred in the pond over a decade, included in three consecutive years leading into 2012. It is the accumulation of phosphorus in the water and in the sediments of the pond that causes the blue-green algae blooms containing toxic cyanobacteria, which can cause nerve disorders in people and animals. The town's board of health closed the pond after one such bloom several years ago.

Selkow said this is not about a bunch of private property owners around the pond looking to protect the waters; he said this is about preservation of the Herring River and the Monomoy lens.

Two years ago, Town Administrator Christopher Clark said, he was before the community preservation committee seeking funding for an alum treatment for Hinckley's Pond, a recommendation that came out of the Hinckley's Pond Evaluation and a component of the town's comprehensive wastewater management plan. But at that time, the committee, on a 5-2 vote, recommended the article not be funded.

Clark said he has brought the article back to the committee this year seeking \$550,000 for the alum treatment and to improve public access to the pond. He heard two concerns when he sought the initial funding. One was that the alum treatment applied to Long Pond several years ago did not work and the other was the lack of public access.

But the Long Pond alum treatment has been a success, Clark said. He also said as part of the request, \$50,000 will be used to develop better public access to the pond. The town owns an access point across Route 124 from the Pleasant Lake General Store, where the Cape Cod Rail Trail crosses. While the town cannot develop parking there, Clark said they will provide bicycle racks, picnic facilities and a stairway to the pond. He called it a "wayfare stop," where people can place their bikes and go across the road and grab a sandwich at the store and come back and enjoy the setting, even do some fishing. Selkow added Hinckley's Pond is 171 acres, the largest pond entirely within Harwich's borders, considered a Great Pond and public under Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

"It's open to all the citizens of the commonwealth," Selkow said. "We worked with the recreation department last year to open up that beach. We think it's a public resource and we want to share it."

Clark also agrees with Selkow that this request is not just about cleaning up Hinckley's Pond, reducing sediment and anaerobic conditions that feed the algae blooms. It's about the watershed and cleaning up water conditions down stream.

"That's an important distinction that has to be made," Clark said. "It's in the comprehensive wastewater management plan."

Clark said using Community Preservation Act funds for pond treatments is an acceptable practice. Selkow cited provisions in the Hinckley's Pond evaluation which suggests CPA funds as the most viable option for funding such lake projects, adding it has been used multiple times in the commonwealth for such improvements, including in Eastham. Clark said the town's capital outlay committee has endorsed this project this year, with CPA monies as the source of funding.

"We have to get people to know this is a big issue," Clark said. "We have to have a discussion in the light of day. We're trying to be transparent with this serious issue."