

Wastewater Project Update & Special Town Meeting

Why now? What's the Rush?

Eastham has long been addressing nitrogen pollution from septic systems, which is polluting local water bodies. Due to lawsuits enforcing the Clean Water Act, all Cape Cod towns are subject to water quality management plans requiring nitrogen reduction in sensitive areas.

Eastham's efforts target major watersheds like Salt Pond and Nauset Marsh, where 75–100% of nitrogen must be removed. In 2024, new DEP rules required towns without sewers to submit nitrogen reduction plans or require property owners to install costly Innovative Alternative (IA) septic systems—averaging \$50,000 to install and \$4,000 per year to maintain.

To avoid burdening residents, Eastham developed a DEP-approved plan that includes building a centralized sewer system for parts of town. Which alleviates the need for all property owners in Town to install IA Systems on their own. Saving individuals thousands and the community, as a whole. millions of dollars.

We realize that this decision may seem rushed. However, we felt it important to let the Town decide. It is inevitable that our community will need to implement a wastewater solution, and a community wastewater system is the most cost-effective, efficient solution that will save each of our property owners thousands of dollars annually, estimated to be over \$120,000 over a 20-year life cycle.

Just recently, we received notice that we are eligible for funding through the State Revolving Fund Loan program (SRF) – which is now guaranteed for our whole project. That notice also indicates that future funding is not guaranteed for an entire project – and likely will not be offered on as attractive terms.

We expect the current guaranteed funding package will provide for loans between 0% and 2.6% and include some amount of loan forgiveness, whereas future funding is not guaranteed, will likely be at higher interest rates, and require the Town to issue its own bonds at market rates – this will add tens of millions of dollars of cost to any eventual project. **The Select Board scheduled a Special Town Meeting on 6/23/2025 to discuss and decide on this single issue. To participate in the SRF Program, the State needs the Town to authorize the project by June 30, 2025.**

What about IA Systems?



Current IA systems will not achieve our nitrogen reduction requirements – meaning ultimately, we will still have to have some form of town sponsored sewer system, and our residents will end up paying twice – once for the IA, and again for a town sewer program.



Cost – we estimate current installation costs will be approximately \$50,000 on average – tax credits of up to \$18,000 may be available. However, these will not offset the cost of expensive annual operating costs and required vendor maintenance contracts – estimated at approximately \$4,000 per year, on average. These systems will likely also need to be upgraded or replaced every 15 – 20 years.



Will IA's work? - an IA system requires a consistent flow in order to operate effectively and efficiently. Although some IA systems can be utilized in a seasonal or part-time home, their effectiveness greatly diminishes, further increasing the need for additional centralized treatment.



IA's take up developable space – just like a Title V system, no building can take place over an inground IA system. Depending upon the hydrology of your specific lot, some IA systems will also be partially above ground or “mounded” systems, further reducing usable lot space.

People concern themselves with noise and odor issues at central treatment plants, which can be addressed and resolved – these issues would also be present for over 5,700 IA systems throughout town, largely incumbent on individual owners to remediate.



Emerging contaminants – DEP regulations are expected to change in upcoming years and require treatment for new contaminants. A centralized system can be modified and upgraded to accommodate new requirements much more easily and cost effectively than 5,730 individual IA systems.



Who will install and service these systems? – practically speaking, it will be near impossible to install thousands of IA systems in Eastham (as well as in neighboring towns) in any orderly, timely or cost-effective manner. Once they are installed, they will need to be consistently serviced – we already have trouble getting contractors to show up for basic electrical, plumbing, or other repair services.