

Wellfleet Seasonal Residents Association

Promoting community involvement and communication



Winter Edition, 2023

*It's time to pay your 2023 dues –
please do so [online](#) or by mail*

Matha Reese Flanagan



Bluebird, South Wellfleet, Anne Sterling

Septic situation is getting serious...Here's what you need to know.

Stories in the *New York Times*, *Cape Cod Times*, *Provincetown Banner* and *Provincetown Independent* in the last few months have all focused on the growing sewage/septic problems on the Cape in general, and some on Wellfleet in particular. All of them note that with increased building in our rural area over the last decades, the problems of both nitrogen and other pollutants, mainly from privately owned septic systems, are endangering our ocean, bay, and pond waters. The sandy soil of the Cape absorbs these elements quickly and transfers them to our waters while rising temperatures make it worse.

No one here wants to live on a swamp where we cannot swim, boat, surf, farm, or enjoy the water that we have polluted beyond repair, and where the oysters cannot live. Do not panic, however. While the problem has been developing for decades, and we need to address it now, we all do not have to shell out thousands of dollars immediately.

In Wellfleet, some homes have old-fashioned cesspools (that are now considered "failed" by definition). Others of us have either grandparented in some kind of almost Title V systems, or Title V systems that were considered good enough. However, without

enhancements, very few of these do the kind of filtration that is referred to as I/A or “innovative or alternative septic systems.”

The state is looking at what each watershed will be required to do to reduce harmful pollutants. There are three solutions: 1) build a town wide sewage system with pipes and water treatment or 2) require individual homeowners to upgrade, or 3) something that combines them. The issues are of course the obvious: who pays for this and how soon can it be done? If the town opts for building a municipal sewage system, we are talking millions and the time to create the infrastructure. Estimates made by our health department suggest it could be \$200 million to sewer the whole town of Wellfleet since we have 70 miles of unpaved rural roads, and a unique geography. This solution is unlikely.

If we require homeowners to each upgrade, we run into the costs (somewhere between \$30,000-\$35,000 for each of us, or maybe as high as \$60,000, and with some retrofitting for about \$15,000-\$25,000, and what kind of loans may be available to help. There's also the small problem of finding the labor force to take on such a massive project. With many folks on the Cape on fixed incomes, the prospect of paying in taxes or loans (if they are available) for all of this is pretty terrifying.

Wellfleet, like the other towns on the Cape, has worked on watershed management plans to address the problem that should have a twenty-year time frame. This will establish realistic timetables, the possible mix of sewer building and private upgrades, and what kind of loans there will be. At the January 11th meeting of Wellfleet's Health Department, there was no real timetable. The health board is well aware of the issue of costs, and is collecting more data on this and on a database that looks at the water table. They are aware that many of us don't know what will be needed. We plan on having a WSRA program on this during the summer..

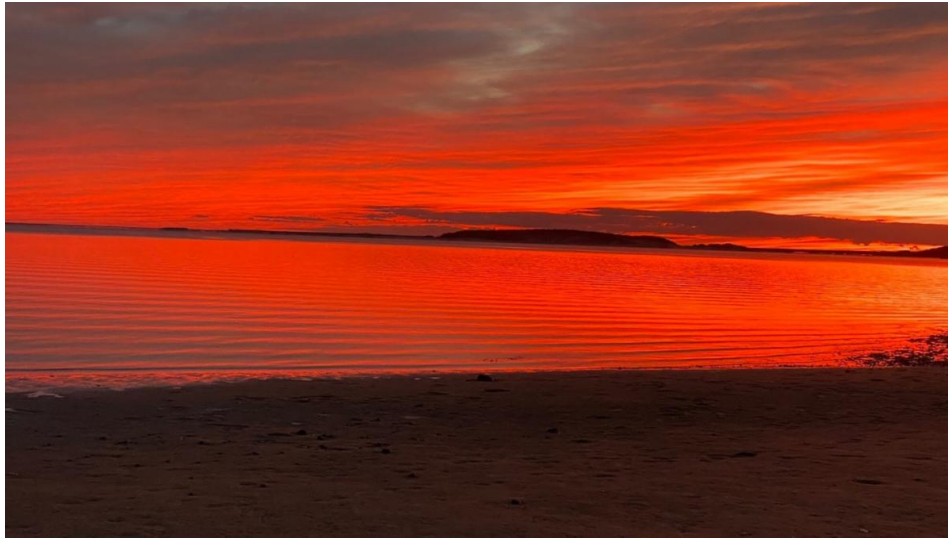
If you google “Wellfleet Harbor Draft TN TMDL,” the first link is to a Massachusetts government site that will let you download the guidance document that has been developed for Wellfleet. According to this draft, we need to reduce as much as 85% of the nitrogen from our septic systems to meet the required goals.

The bottom line is that nothing has to happen tomorrow, and the time table is probably about five years out to start much of this. Some of us who can afford to upgrade should do it as soon as we are able, and especially after the loan options are clear. When we all have to do this is not clear yet. All of us will have to help the town think creatively about what federal, state, and Cape-wide funds can be used to pay for this, what tax funds or new taxes are earmarked to cover some of these costs, and how we protect all of us from having to move rather than pay these expenses. Our life here as we know it really does depend on how these decisions are made. We have pushed this can down the road since the mid 1990s, and now we have run into the end of that road.



Where oh where have the accountants gone, long time passing....

While the town waits to have its so-called “free cash ” (remaining unrestricted funds from its operations of the previous fiscal year) to be certified by the state, we have also lost our town accountants. This is true for other towns as well and some regionalization for this kind of service, and others, may be necessary. Alas, most of this problem reflects the lack of *any* reasonable year round housing and the competition from private employers. Right now Wellfleet is looking into sharing accountants with another town on the Cape. We need this kind of help, however, as soon as possible as we try continue to move on from the mess in our finances that mismanagement made happen over the last few years. Much of the fiscal problem has now been corrected, but we are still in need of town accountants who can oversee our finances.



Sunset, Omaha Beach, Anne Sterling

The state of affordable housing: What's next

The scarcity of affordable housing continues to be the top issue on Wellfleet's public policy agenda. There is a critical shortage of year-round rental housing. Moreover, rents and home sales prices are out of reach of a very significant portion of the workforce needed on the Outer Cape. Short-term seasonal rentals and the boom in pandemic-driven home purchases by part-time residents has compounded the town's housing woes. The lack of housing supply and the exceptional cost of housing has made it hard for many businesses to find the staff they need and has posed a significant barrier to Wellfleet's ability to recruit and retain critical public sector workers.

Wellfleet has launched two initiatives that it hopes will ease the crisis in the long term. First, it responded by leasing town-owned land opposite the elementary school on Lawrence Road to a developer that has agreed to construct 46 units rental housing that will rent for less than market rates. Second, the town has agreed to purchase Maurice's Campground, a 21.5 acre parcel on which it proposes allow construction of additional housing units to meet a wide range of needs that are unavailable in the local real estate market.

The two nonprofit development organizations the town designated to construct the 46-units at 95 Lawrence Road – Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), a national nonprofit based in Boston, and the Community Development Partnership (CDP) based in Orleans – have secured the comprehensive permit from Wellfleet's Zoning Board of Appeal required before the developer could apply for the public subsidies and financing required to begin construction. The new neighborhood will be known as Juniper Hill.

Despite having secured the required permit from Wellfleet, the Commonwealth's Department of Communities and Development initially denied the request by Juniper Hill's developers to apply for an allocation of this year's federal Low Income Housing Tax Credits. These tax credits are the primary vehicle for subsidizing the construction of low-income rental housing in the US. However, the Department recently reversed itself and invited POAH and CDP to compete for funds this year.

Because of the unprecedented inflation in construction costs since the pandemic's onset, the developers are seeking additional funding from local government sources. Wellfleet's Community Preservation Committee (CPC) has recommended a grant of \$1 million and on December 20th the Selectboard unanimously voted to recommend the funding article to the Annual Town Meeting. The POAH-CDP joint venture also plans to submit applications to the towns of Brewster, Orleans and Provincetown for funds from their Community Preservation Committees.

One of the crucial issues at Maurice's is that the sewage now on this site is cesspools. The town is awaiting the state's Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) ruling on this. The town's health department is well aware that we will all be watching what happens here as well as the timetable/rules on septs for the rest of us.

Open Space Survey

The Town Open Space Committee needs your help in developing Wellfleet's Open Space & Recreation 5-Year Plan. Whether you live, work, vacation, or own a business in Wellfleet, you have something to contribute!

How can you help?

Please complete this survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/WellfleetOpenSpace>

Why is your input important?

The 5-Year Plan reflects the goals and priorities of the community relative to open space acquisition and utilization.

Having a 5-Year Plan for Open Space & Recreation enables the Town to apply for thousands of dollars in state, federal, and other grants.

The survey takes about 10 minutes to complete, but the results will yield benefits into the future!

Please respond by February 13, 2023. Be assured that ALL responses are anonymous.

The Open Space Committee thanks you in advance for participating in this survey.

COVID update

Health and Conservation Department agent Hillary Greenberg-Lemos reported at the January monthly meeting that the COVID risk in Barnstable County is again at a high level. Since the state only tracks PCR tests, those of us who test at home are not counted and the numbers are probably an undercount. She suggested that to be safe we should all be wearing our masks in public indoor settings.

Dues and donations, please

WSRA counts on its members to pay dues without receiving an annual invoice. Dues and individual donations are WSRA's only sources of funding-- \$25 for a single membership or \$35 for a family/household membership per calendar year.

To pay by PayPal:

- Renew your [Family Membership](#)

- Renew your [Individual Membership](#)
- Make a [Donation](#)

You may also mail your payment to:

WSRA
P.O. Box 1323
Wellfleet, MA 02667-1323

If you would like more than one member of your household to receive email from WSRA, please [email](#) us!

THANK YOU!



Winter Death, Chipman's Cove, Judy Motzkin

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