

New Coalition Formed Supporting Use Of Community Preservation Funds For Water Quality Issues



By Erin McKinley

Nearly four dozen East End environmental, civic and business groups are teaming up to help spread the word—and drum up public support—for a proposition appearing on November’s ballot that seeks to use as much as 20 percent of future Community Preservation Fund proceeds to protect the region’s ground and surface waters.

The Clean Water and Community Preservation Committee officially launched at a press conference held behind Riverhead’s Main Street last Thursday morning and includes groups from all five East End towns—Southampton, East Hampton, Riverhead, Southold and Shelter Island. Those represented included the Amagansett Springs Aquifer Protection Association, the East Quogue Civic Association, Group for the East End and the Peconic Baykeeper, among others.

The goal of the group is to raise awareness of the proposition that, if approved by voters, will allow towns to set aside a portion of their CPF money to address water quality issues, not just land preservation. The upgrading and replacement of septic systems are expected to be a main use for the

allocated funding—estimated to total between \$10 million and \$12 million annually in Southampton Town alone.

The proposition also seeks approval of extending the CPF, now set to expire in 2030, by an additional 20 years, until 2050. The CPF is funded by a 2-percent tax on most real estate transactions and is presently used to protect open space, as well as agricultural and recreational resources.

“Today, we feel an expansion of this CPF has just as much hope as it did when we started 20 years ago,” Group for The East End President Bob DeLuca said at the press conference. “We see it as an initiative that will launch other efforts for water preservation because, as you know, our water is in deep trouble, and it is time to get moving on specific action.”

To date, roughly 10,000 acres of open space have already been preserved across the East End using CPF money. The November referendum, which will appear on the back of the general election ballot, will ask voters to allow as much as 20 percent of fund’s revenues to also be used for water quality projects.

Several local politicians were present at the coalition launch, including State Senator Kenneth P. LaValle, East Hampton Town Supervisor Larry Cantwell, State Assemblyman Fred Thiele Jr., and Kevin McDonald, conservation project director for public lands with The Nature Conservancy.

“I am confident that with the past support for the CPF, that once again the voters of East Hampton will step up and vote for the preservation of the environment,” Mr. Cantwell said.