Newsday

Bay Park sewage treatment plant deal must reduce nitrogen

Updated December 29, 2015 4:46 PM

By The Editorial Board

Digestor tanks at Nassau County's Bay Park Sewage Treatment Plant in East Rockaway Photo Credit: Kevin P Coughlin (2011)

The fact that state officials are close to a deal with Nassau County on the Bay Park sewage treatment plant is good news. But the deal must include a satisfactory commitment to reducing nitrogen so it no longer degrades the water into which the plant dumps its effluent.

The agreement with the state Department of Environmental Conservation calls for Nassau to build an outfall pipe to the Atlantic Ocean and for Long Beach to connect its plant to Bay Park, ending decades of the two facilities destroying the western bays ecosystem. That's good. The agreement also requires Nassau to install at the plant two nitrogen removal systems that would reduce concentrations of the pollutant well below current levels, and the county has agreed to do that. That also is progress. And it would free up for the pipe $150 million in federal funding intended for a state-of-the-art nitrogen removal system.

But the nitrogen that would be dumped in the ocean — and in the western bays while the pipe is being built — still would be higher than the target set by the Environmental Protection Agency. That target also was set by the DEC in letters to federal authorities as a condition for renewing Bay Park's permit and the federal funds for nitrogen reduction. With the DEC shift to the higher limit, the agency and EPA are discussing whether that is sufficient to protect the western bays.

Whatever is decided, the agreement must include the required study on whether more stringent nitrogen removal is needed after the pipe is built and the two systems are installed. And the state and county must provide the additional treatment if deemed warranted. Let's remember the goal: to restore the western bays without damaging the ocean. Anything less is unacceptable.

http://nwsdy.li/1PdRGDm