

Letter in support of Water and Sewer for Rt. 6 area (cont)

The Conservation Law Foundation sued the EPA and DEP several years ago over their failure to enforce the Clean Water Act. As a result, last year the State DEP proposed new regulations aimed at removing nitrogen (N) pollution from embayments. These draconian changes would have required every septic system in Westport to be replaced with an expensive denitrifying system. The Westport Board of Health and others put together a case to exempt the Town from these new regs based on our efforts to date AND our plans to move forward with sewerizing parts of the Town. Thankfully DEP acquiesced and turned their attention to the Cape. But because the Westport River is still on the EPA/DEP impaired waters list, make no mistake, they will be back.

What the Town has created, through the Infrastructure Oversight Committee, is a plan to install what will be the foundation for bringing water and sewer to the greater Rt. 6 area, this is the proposed trunkline. It is a big piece of infrastructure which is very much oversized to serve the initial 200+ properties abutting Rt. 6. This is because the trunkline is designed to accept all of the future tie ins from all the side streets. In fact, the \$35M price tag is far too much to place on the shoulders of these first property owners and this is why the rest of the Town needs to share in the cost, hence the Ballot Question.

So why not wait until the State requires us to make these changes? The simple answer is that we are much better off controlling our own destiny with regard to the timing of this project. If we act now, we will have the opportunity to plan the larger buildout to the neighborhoods over a time period of our choosing, not one imposed by the State. Acting now will allow us to pursue some of the once-in-a-generation federal infrastructure funding and obtain grants and low interest loans to pay for much of the work.

Although the Town's efforts to date have been focused on avoiding costly consequences, we should not lose sight of the project's expected favorable outcomes. This project offers us the opportunity to hit the trifecta of having a positive impact on human health, economic development, and the environment. When the entire project is complete, there will be a measurable and significant improvement to water quality in the Westport River. We are hopeful that those taxpayers not directly affected will recognize this as well as the cost avoidance nature of the plan. We are also hopeful that, given the wider financial support of the town, North End residents will be persuaded that this is the best of a number of options going forward and that their properties will increase in value with these services.

It is not a question of if, but rather when, sewerizing will come to Westport. Let's address this challenge now and not leave it to our children and grandchildren. So please turn out on April 9th and vote yes for clean water for Westport. It's time.

R. Michael Sullivan is the President of the Westport River Watershed Alliance formerly a member and Chairman of the Select Board