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Breaking News: a wildlife-friendly culvert for Ligonee Brook gets a boost.

FRIENDS OF THE LONG POND GREENBELT

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Established in 1997, FPLG is a 501c3 not-for-profit organization dedicated to the preservation, stewardship, and public appreciation of the Long Pond Greenbelt in the Town of Southampton, on the East End of Long Island, New York.

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Having a properly designed wildlife-friendly culvert for Ligonee Brook, which runs beneath the Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike, included in Suffolk County's plans for upgrading the roadway, took a positive turn last month. A committee of the legislature recommended funding a \$100,000 proposal for the culvert's redesign through the county's Water Quality Improvement Program. Following ten years of advocacy by Friends of the Long Pond Greenbelt for an improved culvert, the recent sad death of an otter sparked additional focus on the problem. Mike Bottini, head of the Long Island River Otter Project at the Seatuck Environmental Association, enlisted The Nature Conservancy to develop detailed wildlife-friendly designs for the culvert replacement, which were recently submitted to Charles Bartha, Commissioner of the Suffolk County Department of Public Works. At the committee's recent meeting Commissioner Bartha offered his support for a redesign process. We are proud to have been laying the groundwork since 2015 toward this moment and eagerly await the full legislature's approval of the funding.

Plans to improve the culvert have a long history. In 2009 FPLG supported the trustees' application to the Peconic Estuary Program for Ligonee Brook to be included in their Conceptual Habitat Restoration Designs Study. Based on that study, which was completed in 2013, and approached by Eagle Scout Max Yardley about a possible project in the Long Pond Greenbelt, we recommended he remove the culverts under the Old Railroad Spur. He did an amazing job removing the two culverts, thereby allowing alewives and American eels to commute back and forth from Sag Harbor Cove to Long Pond. His ambitious project also included building a new footbridge over Ligonee.

Annually, FPLG has led projects and enlisted countless volunteers in an attempt to keep debris from accumulating in Ligonee and potentially washing into the culverts. And in 2020 we were able to convince the Southampton Town Trustees to remove the crushed culvert at the head of Long Pond.

When Suffolk County's plan to upgrade the Bridgehampton/Sag Harbor Turnpike was announced in 2015, FPLG was immediately in touch with the Department of Public Works proposing a public meeting. Because of time delays and the onset of the Covid-19 crisis, it wasn't until 2021 that Suffolk County Legislator Bridget Fleming organized the meeting with the Commissioner of Public Works, William Hillman, and we were finally able to have the rebuilding of the Ligonee culvert get attention.

In a well-publicized public meeting held in June of 2024, organized by County Legislator Ann Welker, Suffolk County Executive Ed Romaine and the new Commissioner of Public Works Charles Bartha led an animated and fruitful community discussion.

Since then we have met with Jean Claudy Lamantagne of the Suffolk County Department of Public Works and Highway Engineering to discuss the Ligonee culvert. We took the opportunity to also show Jean a second culvert, one of which the county was unaware, that feeds outflow from The Great Swamp to the Long Pond Greenbelt. We also urged him to take into the account the fact that the LPG Nature Preserve runs the entire length of the turnpike stressing that improvements to the curbing in the plan for the northern portion should not repeat the mistakes that were made on the southern portion of the turnpike, which resulted in so many turtle deaths.

We hope this new focus bringing about a new design will not only correct the Ligonee culverts but also help convince the majority land owners of the Long Pond Greenbelt -- Southampton Town, The Nature Conservancy and Suffolk County -- to take seriously the myriad threats to this fragile ecosystem.

In the meanwhile, we are in contact with Jean Claudy Lamantagne to monitor the project's progress.