

Upgrading your septic system: Public Contract or Private Contract

In August 2009, Old Saybrook voters overwhelmingly chose to pursue a decentralized wastewater management district approach to address their long-term sewage treatment needs, rather than a centralized sewer system. The implementation of this program, which will occur in phases from 2010-2018, will require the upgrade of approximately 1900 septic systems to meet new minimum requirements, known as the Upgrade Program Standards. What this means is that the following process will occur for each property in the designated district:

1. The Old Saybrook Water Pollution Control Authority (OSWPCA), in conjunction with the Connecticut River Area Health District (CRAHD) will conduct an evaluation of the property to determine if the existing septic system meets the minimum requirements of the Upgrade Program Standards adopted for the district.
 - a. If the septic system meets or exceeds the standards, then a new permit will be issued to the property by CRAHD affirming that status
 - b. If the septic system does NOT meet those standards, then an upgrade to meet those standards will be required. That upgrade could involve the expansion of the existing system, the construction of a new system, or the installation of an advanced treatment system (AT) system. If the requirement is to upgrade the septic system, the property owner will receive an order to do so from CRAHD. If the requirement is to install an AT system, the property owner will receive an order to abandon their existing system from CRAHD, and an order to install an AT system from the OSWPCA.
 - c. AT systems will only be required on specified “water proximity” lots and on lots where there is insufficient room to construct a septic system that meets the Standards.
2. If an upgrade is needed, the property owner has two choices on how to meet this requirement
 - a. They can hire a septic system installer (and engineer, if necessary) to design and install a system which is compliant with the Standards, or
 - b. They can allow the town to perform the upgrade as part of a contract for properties in their neighborhood.

Note that all septic system upgrades, whether performed by a town-sponsored contractor or one hired by the property owner, will be required to be reviewed and approved by CRAHD.

This brochure is intended to offer the property owner some ideas on what each of these options might entail. The three major categories that the property owner might consider when making this decision are Cost, Control, and Convenience.

It should be noted that, if the decision is to participate in the town upgrade contract, the property owner will still be involved, to a certain extent, with decisions regarding the siting of the new or upgraded system on their property. In addition, the town will work with the property owner on issues such as construction scheduling, although flexibility on this issue may be limited due to contractual constraints. All town-sponsored contracts will require the contractor to restore the property’s landscaping to a condition equal to or better than its pre-construction status.

Here's a quick comparison of the two options:

Category	If the town performs the upgrade:	If the property owner performs the upgrade:
Cost	Advantage: The property owner will pay only half of the cost of the upgrade (the town and DEP Clean Water Fund pick up the other half). The property owner's half will be in the form of a lien against the property at 2% interest, with 20 years to pay it back	Advantage: The contractor is not required to pay state prevailing wage rates, so construction may be less expensive, and property owner may "shop around" for a contractor
	Disadvantage: The property owner is not involved with negotiating the cost of the upgrade.	Disadvantage: The property owner has to arrange for their own financing, and won't be eligible for the 25% grant and 2% loan (20 year term) under the DEP's Clean Water Fund, or partial subsidy (25%) from the town's funds.
Control	Advantage: The contractor is bound by a specific contract requiring specifying performance standards, enforced by the town and their consultants.	Advantage: The property owner can negotiate the terms of the upgrade to meet their specific needs rather than relying on a general contract document covering dozens of properties.
	Disadvantage: The property owner has no say in the selection of the contractor, though the Town will try to work with the property owner.	Disadvantage: Managing on-site upgrades may be difficult and time-consuming if the property owner is not skilled in either contracting or septic system installation.
Convenience	Advantage: The town will handle the hiring and the scheduling of the contractor, and will have engineers and inspectors under contract to assure that the upgrade is properly done.	Advantage: The property owner has substantial flexibility in the timing of the upgrade (subject to the time constraints in the CRAHD order to upgrade).
	Disadvantage: The property owner has very limited input on the timing of the project	Disadvantage: The property owner has to hire their own contractor, and possibly an engineer, to design and install the upgrade. The responsibility for compliance with the Standards is on the property owner.