



# Saybrook On-Site Plan Passes

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**Old Saybrook** - Sewers are once again off the table in Old Saybrook.

On Tuesday, property owners voted to proceed with a plan to require systematic upgrades to individual septic systems and spend up to \$42 million to fund the plan.

In the largest voter turnout in recent referendums, property owners voted 1,830-982 in favor of creating a Decentralized Wastewater Management District to oversee the upgrades. A majority of property owners - 1,691 - also voted to spend up to \$42 million on the upgrade program, while 1,062 voted against the appropriation. Voter turnout was about 37.5 percent.

## THE VOTE

- **Question 1**, to create Decentralized Wastewater Management District:

**Yes: 1,830; No: 982**

- **Question 2**, to appropriate \$42 million for the upgrade program:

**Yes: 1,691; No: 1,062**

"I'm simply proud to live in a community that has such respect for the environment," Selectman Bill Peace said after the vote. First Selectman Michael Pace was away on vacation.

Selectwoman Velma Thomas agreed, saying, "I'm just glad that the overall community put the town first. That's what's most important. They didn't just look at what's in front of them, they looked at the future of the town."

The vote Tuesday means the town will not have to return to court on a 1990 lawsuit the state Department of Environmental Protection filed to force the town to address what was said to be a groundwater-pollution issue stemming from, among other things, failing or antiquated septic systems.

The two parties reached an agreement in 2005 to abate groundwater pollution not with a central wastewater treatment plant but with the on-site solution voters approved Tuesday: requiring upgrades of individual septic systems for up to 1,900 homes in the town's beach communities.

The DEP recently warned that a rejection of the local wastewater-district plan would mean another battle in court, likely resulting in a final order for Old Saybrook to build a sewer plant.

For a town with a robust sewer-avoidance program and a keen interest in preserving the shoreline community's small-town character with controlled growth, that was not an option.

The local wastewater district will essentially give the town the authoritative teeth health districts currently lack to require system upgrades, according to DEP officials. Health districts can only force upgrades in the face of active failures or backups.

The district will also monitor upgrades and require strict maintenance programs to ensure systems - both conventional septic and more advanced AT systems - continue to operate as designed.

The Water Pollution Control Authority has stated that the majority of homeowners in the 15 targeted areas will require little or no upgrades. About 300 homeowners - those whose properties sit close to the water - will need to replace their conventional septic systems with more expensive alternative treatment (AT) systems that are said to reduce nitrogen levels in effluent more efficiently.

The upgrades will take an estimated seven years and are expected to begin in January.