

Joint Senate/Assembly Hearing on Water Quality and Contamination

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By George Hoffman,

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Good afternoon, My name is George Hoffman and I am representing the Setauket Harbor Task Force.

We are an all volunteer, clean water, healthy harbors, advocacy group located in western Brookhaven.

The Task Force is also a member of the Citizens Advisory Committee of the Long Island Sound Study - the federal- bi state compact established to protect the Long Island Sound.

Thank you for holding this hearing today on water quality on Long Island. As a volunteer group it's hard to get up to Albany to speak with policy makers about our water quality issues here on the Island - this hearing is very helpful.

Our surface waters are the probably the main reason most people choose to live on or visit Long Island.

Boating, fishing, swimming, sunbathing or just staring out at the ocean or Sound is why all of us live here.

Now I am not going to speak about the science of water quality, there are lots of very qualified people providing testimony today, but I would like to talk about the problem of how does one access all of the scientific information that is being generated about the quality and resilience of our surface waters here on Long Island.

When we first established the task force, just a group of residents who care about the harbor we live adjacent to, we couldn't find one central repository for information about Setauket Harbor.

Getting answers to simple questions like

- What was the quality of its water,
- Is it safe to swim or eat the clams or fish from its waters.
- Is the harbor thriving or in jeopardy,

- Who has jurisdiction over the well being of the Harbor.

Sounds like simple questions but finding someone who could give you answers was tougher and required meetings, letters and phone calls just to get a sense of where to look.

We found that there is an alphabet soup of agencies and governing bodies that have some jurisdiction but not one can give you information about the entire health and resilience of the harbor.

So if I could make one recommendation to this committee that will be making policy recommendations for water quality it would be to establish or designate one entity to be a clearinghouse for all of the information about the surface waters on Long Island.

I'll give you some example of the multiple jurisdictions on water quality:

There's LINAP - a multi governmental initiative being coordinated by NYS DEC to study and make recommendations on how to reduce nitrogen in Long Island ground and surface waters

The federal EPA at the same time launched its own water quality program to limit nitrogen and phosphorus in surface waters.

Suffolk County recently announced a new nitrogen reduction initiative that will focus on upgrading septic systems

The NYS DEC is overhauling its MS4 (municipal stormwater program) that will set new rules for reducing stormwater that runs into our harbors bays and rivers.

And Suffolk County Health Department oversees sanitary regulations

And the one level of government that has real & direct authority over all zoning and land use issues (which includes shorelines) such as new development, stormwater management are the villages and towns.

And I am not sure the towns and villages are in the information loop.

Our citizens advocacy group is finding that we can be most helpful pulling together all of the information that's out there and bridging the gap with policy makers about what needs to be done to protect our shore and near shore waters.

We have been forced to become the in-house experts on Setauket Harbor and harbor science.

Local government has so many things to do and so little funding to do it that advocacy groups, like ours, can help be the squeaky wheel that help prods government response and action.

You can help by requiring that all information on water quality be managed and centralized and hopefully integrated in agency or commission - so that community groups can find out what is going in the waters of their community.

Thank you.

