

How to Upgrade Your Septic System to Combat Nitrogen Pollution and Protect Water Quality

Here in Quogue, water is all around us. Protecting these waterways is an investment in the health and well-being of the people and wildlife that make Quogue their home. Both are increasingly threatened by nitrogen pollution in our bays and waterways caused by outdated home septic systems.

That's why the Quogue Village Board of Trustees is encouraging homeowners to consider replacing their outdated home septic tanks with state-of-the-art systems that remove up to 70 percent of the nitrogen that would otherwise leach into the ground underneath your home, eventually making its way through underground streams into our bays and creeks.

While the process can be disruptive and costly – to buy and install a current system currently costs between \$25,000 and \$40,000 -- the good news is that significant funding is available to cover these costs.

The bad news is that money is just half the battle. Paperwork and diligence are also required, which is why the Village has created this guide to help homeowners tackle this challenge with as few headaches as possible.

The Village has also retained Chris Clapp of Clean Water Advisors to help guide you through the grant, permitting, and planning processes. While you will have to retain your own contractors/experts to do the actual design and installation, Chris will be available to help jump start and explain the process. He can be reached at chris@cleanwateradvisorsllc.com

Does your septic system need replacing?

Today there are essentially three types of septic systems in use in our area: current nitrogen-reducing models, old septic tanks shaped like large

cement donuts, and even older cesspools that collect waste that is released into the ground over time.

Since 2018, nitrogen-reducing septic systems have been required in the village for any newly built home or when a home undergoes a significant renovation.

Homes built on or near waterways with outdated septic systems or cesspools are most in need of replacing.

Where septic refund money comes from

In 2015, Suffolk County became among the first municipalities in the nation to create a program to provide significant financial support to homeowners to upgrade to nitrogen-reducing septic systems.

Today, \$20,000 in grant funds are available from Suffolk County's Septic Improvement Program, which includes \$10,000 from the county and another \$10,000 in matching funds from New York State. Since 2016, Southampton Town also provides an additional \$20,000 in rebate funds, which can be used to cover the cost of reinstalling landscaping and other costs incurred during installation.

Required Paperwork

To access these grants, homeowners need to compile documentation to support their application. It is important to remember that the paperwork needs to be submitted and approved prior to installation in order to be eligible for grant funds. Here is a checklist of necessary items:

- Current deed
- An original Certificate of Occupancy or "equivalent"
- Proof of Insurance
- Proof of property tax payment

- Paperwork identifying incorporating members or beneficiaries to demonstrate who is legally responsible for your home if your property is owned by a Trust, LLC or Corporation.

Paperwork that will be necessary for designing the new system and applying for permits will include:

- Property survey
- A layout of your house that identifies all bedrooms
- Any current or past NY DEC permits if your property is near coastline or wetlands

Septic failures receive priority

Any homeowner experiencing a septic failure, such as liquid waste coming to the surface or backing up inside a house, or who has what is known as a “block cesspool” (which are old systems made by hand from bricks or stone) receive priority in the application process if they can provide the following:

- Septic pumping receipts if you pump to empty your septic system or cesspool 4 or more times per years
- Photo of any sewer failure
- Photo of block cesspool

Notes on Paperwork:

1. The Quogue Village Building department has C of Os on file and can provide a copy on request.
2. The county determines the size and capacity of the septic you require for your house based on the number of bedrooms, which it uses to determine the potential number of people who live or could live in your house.
3. Your property survey must identify any underground utilities including gas, water and electric. In most cases the designer can utilize your current survey.

4. Soil samples are required to determine the shape and placement of the new septic system to avoid contaminating local ground water and are generally handled by the engineer or architect you hire to design the system and its placement.

Next steps for homeowners

Once paperwork has been assembled, homeowners are responsible for the following:

- Hiring a “design professional” such as an engineer or architect to design the layout of the new system.
- Hiring an installer approved by Suffolk County
- Developing a plan to restore any landscaping disrupted by the new septic installation

The County has a list of installers and their baseline costs published on their [website](#). You must use one of these county-approved installers to receive county funding and reimbursement.

If your application is approved, the County will pay your contractor to purchase and install your new septic system.

Once the installation is complete, the homeowner will have to pay for landscaping and irrigation to be restored. The cost to move water lines or other underground systems impacted by the install, as well as engineering, design, landscaping or other associated plumbing costs, are also eligible for rebates from the Town of Southampton of up to \$20,000.

Timing:

Currently, the County grant processing period can take up to five months for non-failure upgrades.

If you have pumped your existing system more than 4 times in the last 12 months and can provide receipts that document your costs, you will get priority. If you have a “catastrophic failure” and a component of your existing system has collapsed creating a health and safety threat, you may be able to bypass most of the process and get a system installed immediately.

Once your Southampton permit is received you will also need a permit from the Village of Quogue, which typically takes a few days. The Board of Trustees has waived the fees associated with the issuance of permits for the voluntary upgrade of septic systems.

Installations of the septic system typically take no more than two days.

Links to funding applications

- Fill out a grant application, available at <https://aca-prod.accela.com/SUFFOLKCO/Welcome.aspx>
- [Town Of Southampton Grant/Rebate](#)

OTHER RESOURCES:

[Suffolk County Septic Improvement Program](#)

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<https://reclaimourwater.info/Septic-Improvement-Program>