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*Suffolk County officials and construction leaders shovel dirt at the groundbreaking ceremony for the sewer expansion project. / Courtesy of Suffolk County*

By: David Winzelberg November 1, 2021

Long Island business and labor leaders were joined by Suffolk County officials at a groundbreaking ceremony last week for a massive \$400 million sewer expansion project.

The project known as the Suffolk County Coastal Resiliency Initiative will connect nearly 6,000 parcels along the county's south shore to sewers, eliminating thousands of cesspools and septic systems that have been identified as a primary cause of the fouling of local bays.

Constructed with federal and state grant funds, the project is part of a plan to make the region's coastline more resistant to storm surge in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, which hit the area exactly nine years before Friday's groundbreaking.

The sewer expansion project includes the connection of 2,184 homes in the Carlls River Watershed in Babylon to an existing county sewer district, and the connection of 1,884 parcels in the Forge River Watershed in Brookhaven to a new treatment plant being built in Mastic. In addition, 1,489 homes located in Suffolk County Sewer District No. 3 that had never been tied into the collection system, will be

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connected as part of the project. The construction is being completed at no cost to homeowners, according to a county statement.

Installation of sewer collection system piping in roadways and the connection of individual homes will begin this month, officials said. Work on the Forge River project is expected to begin before the end of the month.

The major funding for the project includes \$243 million from FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program, and \$66 million from the Community Development Block Grant – Disaster Recovery program administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. New York State has committed \$30.7 million in state financial assistance, and Suffolk County will invest \$42 million of its allotment in American Rescue Plan funding received from the federal government, and \$24 million from a sewer stabilization reserve fund.

"On the ninth anniversary of Superstorm Sandy, we are taking a huge step forward in our efforts to make Long Island more resistant to climate change," said County Executive Steve Bellone. "Thanks to the strong support we have received from Senator Chuck Schumer and our partners in New York State government, we have reached an important milestone as we bring these historic projects to the point of construction. Injecting \$400 million into the regional economy will help boost our economic recovery from the COVID pandemic. Not only that, but this project will eliminate nearly 6,000 of the cesspools and septic systems that scientists tell us are killing our bays and harbors. This a tremendous victory for our economy and our environment."

John Cameron, chairman of the Long Island Regional Planning Council, said the groundbreaking marks a "historic day for water quality" and a major step forward in protecting and preserving Long Island's water.

"The Long Island Regional Planning Council is partners with Suffolk County, the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation and Nassau County on the Long Island Nitrogen Action Plan to reduce nitrogen pollution in Long Island waters," Cameron said in the statement. "The most effective solution for nitrogen pollution in high density communities is the installation of sewers. Suffolk County leadership is to be commended for developing large-scale projects to extend sewers that will benefit our environment as well as our economy."