



Stewards
For the
Coastal Environment

Salt Ponds Coalition

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Preserving our coastal ponds: Point Judith, Potter, Card, Trustum, Green Hill, Ninigret, Quonochontaug, Winnapaug, Maschaug, Little Maschaug

Beach Pavilion Committee
c/o Town Hall
4540 South County Trail
Charlestown, RI 02813

March 28, 2011

Dear Beach Pavilion Committee Member,

Salt Ponds Coalition has been following the beach pavilion discussions with interest and would like to urge the committee to take a good look at solutions that utilizes either storage tanks, to be pumped on a regular basis, or composting toilets.

For years these sites have used outdated systems that are decades old. Systems such as these contribute substantial nitrogen to the groundwater, which can be harmful to the salt ponds. In fact, a recent study by URI conducted in Quonochontaug and involving the Charlestown wastewater commission found that the area adjacent to Blue Shutters has substantially elevated nitrogen in the ground water.

The systems at both Blue Shutters and Town Beach need to be replaced and the best time to do so is at the point of renovation or replacement of the existing structures. Leaving the present systems in service should not be an option. Under town and state regulations area residents are required to update to new technology when they do extensive work; the same standards should apply to the town sites. SPC believes that pump-out or composting toilet options offer the safest and most cost-effective solution for the town.

The simplest solution is to install tight tanks and pump them throughout the season. At current beach-use rates the volume of waste should be manageable for pumping and trucking. Town officials report that recent usage of each beach has been approximately 10,000 cars per year. Using the town's own assumptions (two people per car, five gallons of wastewater per person) that works out to 100,000 gallons of waste, or 28 trips with a large (3600 gallon) truck. At per-gallon rates comparable to what homeowners are charged, that would be about \$14,000 per year per site. At that rate, it would take 15 years of paying for pump outs to reach the cost of an in-ground system (assuming each system cost \$200,000 to design and build). And that is assuming 0% for the cost of money. Add interest associated with paying for an expensive system up front and it will take many more years to break even.

Composting toilets would also provide environmentally friendly disposal of the waste, as long as the nutrient-rich remains are properly disposed of off site. However, the sinks in the facilities would still have to be handled with either tight tanks or in-ground denitrifying systems. Obviously, if tight tanks were used in tandem with composting toilets, the volume of waste to truck would be much less.

The alternative - putting everything into in-ground denitrifying systems - is an expensive and risky proposition. These systems have many mechanical and electrical parts and would be subject to inundation and extensive damage by coastal flooding. Both of these sites are very low and have a history of flooding in gales let alone hurricanes. Coastal erosion is a big concern as well. Not so long ago South Kingstown built an expensive new pavilion for the town beach, only to suffer serious

losses as the beach eroded under the structure. Now erosion is threatening their in-ground septic system.

These are both simple beaches with limited parking. We urge the town to keep things simple and protect the valuable resources that make this area so desirable. 65% of the town revenue comes from property tax on residences close to the ponds (south of Route 1) and only 1% from beach revenue. Talk of bringing in more visitors to boost beach revenues sounds good, but it will only force risky investment in expensive high-volume infrastructure and compound crowding issues, of which so many town residents already complain. SPC encourages the town to allocate adequate resources to fully explore the self-contained and/or composting toilet options. We believe they will be the safest investment and the best choice for the environment. At current or modestly increased usage rates, they should both be attractive options.

Sincerely,

Mark Bullinger
Executive Director