

LarchmontLedge

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Battling Pollution on Long Island Sound is Demanding and Expensive Reports Panel at Local Summit Meeting

By John Bradley

Although numerous steps have been taken to improve the waters of Long Island Sound, in some ways we may be worse off than we were 20 years ago. This is evidenced by the continued lack of oxygen in the waters off Mamaroneck and Larchmont, perhaps the worst in the Sound, and the increasing loss of beach days in the area because of pollution from sewer runoff. Addressing these issues was a panel of professionals who spoke at the October 15th meeting of the Larchmont/Mamaroneck Local Summit.

Long Island Sound is an estuary and estuaries provide more natural life than any other habitat except coral reefs and rain forests, explained Tom Andersen from the advocacy group Save the Sound, headquartered in New Haven, CT. "However, in 2012 the waters off Larchmont and Mamaroneck were so bad that there effectively was no fish life, and 2013 was only marginally better," he said.



Richard Slingerland

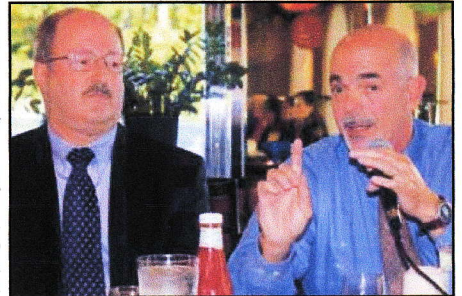
By Save the Sound's count, the waters off Mamaroneck and Larchmont are the worst areas of the Sound today—and this after more than 20 years of work by many groups trying to improve conditions there. He added that, measured by the number of beach closings, 2013 was much worse than 2012. In 2012 there were 112 beach days lost to pollution in the Sound, while 134 beach days were lost during the summer of 2013.

WHAT ARE THE CAUSES?

Aging sewer systems, many over 100 years old, clogged storm drains and catch basins, prescription drugs, chemicals and paper products flushed down toilets, waste water dumped into storm sewer systems, salt and chemical drainage from streets and highways, fertilizer and herbicide runoff from lawns, droppings from animals and birds, waste discharges from boats and ships represent but a short list of challenges for state, county, and local public officials charged with preserving water quality along the beaches of Larchmont, Mamaroneck and the Sound Shore Communities.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

"Flushables" were first among County Commissioner Thomas J. Lauro's stated concerns. He said, "Only toilet paper is flushable, not wipes, not facial tissues and most especially, not prescription and over-the-counter drugs," traces of which show up in fish and other aquatic life. Water born prescription



Thomas Lauro (left) and Patrick Ferracane

drugs also create drug resistant bacteria, a mounting threat to human health. Lauro noted that his Department of Environmental Facilities runs a monthly drug drop-off program. Residents who need to dispose of the contents of their medicine cabinets can find the location and hours of the drop-off centers on the County website, westchestergov.com

The County is addressing the waste water problem by upgrading treatment plants in Mamaroneck and New Rochelle. The Mamaroneck plant is estimated to cost some \$54 million at completion; while the plant in New Rochelle has an upgrade budget of \$321 million.

Lauro's department is also working to improve the water quality by planting native species of flowers, grasses, and bushes all along the County's streams and waterways to stem the erosion of soil and the runoff of chemical-bearing sediments which flow into the Sound.

Richard Slingerland, Manager, Village of Mamaroneck cited an exhaustive list of initiatives that the Village has undertaken to locate the sources of water pollution, mitigate the damage they cause and prevent recurrences. Working in cooperation with Tom Andersen and Save the Sound, the Village has introduced a system for the testing and renewal of damaged, decayed and aging sewers and sewer pipes. Rather than excavating them, the Village relines pipes with a substance that seals breaks and provides them with renewed utility.

Among the more surprising victories in Slingerland's and Andersen's efforts was the discovery of a dumpster of A&P butcher shop leavings that was parked over a storm sewer. Its effluent led into the storm drain and from there into Long Island Sound. Removing the dumpster represented a measurable improvement in water quality.

To help insure that there are no improper-drainage hook-ups from homes, the Village of Mamaroneck and the Unincorporated part of the Town of Mamaroneck require a Discharge Certificate to be submitted along with the closing documents that accompany the sale of a house. This requires a plumber to come into the home and affirm that all draining connections are legal. The Village of Larchmont does not require this.

Asked at the close of the meeting what the panelists understand "clean water" to be, they cited the U.S. EPA's definition: water that is "swimmable and fishable."



Tom Andersen. All photos by John Gitlitz.

There are two types of water borne pollution, nitrogen and pathogens, explained Patrick Ferracane of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. Nutrients from soil and other organic materials raise nitrogen levels in the water. This leads to the reduction of oxygen and a condition known as hypoxia. Hypoxia causes dead zones, areas where no fish can live. Equally injurious to aquatic and human life are pathogens, disease causing organisms that find their way into soil and water if not identified and treated. The recent sewer line breaks at the Mamaroneck and Beach and Yacht Club and the Jefferson Avenue bridge sparked concerns about human exposure to pathogens that were escaping from the sewer pipes that transport waste to the water treatment systems.

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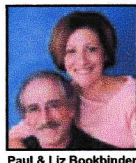
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