

Newsday Rising groundwater focus of Hauppauge meeting

BY STACEY ALTHERR | stacey.altherr@newsday.com August 23, 2007

Weary from two years of pumping basements, 375 people packed a conference room at the Hyatt Wind Watch Hotel in Hauppauge last night to hear from scientists and other experts on the phenomenon of rising groundwater in Suffolk County.

Residents of Smithtown, Islip and Brook-haven attended the meeting sponsored by civic associations. Civic activist Tony Cuzzucoli thanked local politicians for their help, but said more assistance is needed.

He spoke about residents' problems leading to foreclosed homes, unusually high electric bills and people who are "prisoners in their own homes."

He asked politicians to request that the Army Corps of Engineers respond to the crisis.

Residents have been contending with rising groundwater problems for decades, but the situation has become worse since heavy rains in October 2005, which have kept the water table in the area at record highs. Most of the affected areas are in Lake Ronkonkoma in the area of Charles Court, along nearby Smithtown Boulevard, and to the south in the Lake Hills and Hauppauge areas, as well as the Millers Pond area of Smithtown.

Residents say they are pumping 24 hours a day in order to keep the water out of their basements.

Among the issues, according to published studies, is the clay underneath the area. When it rains heavily, the water can't be absorbed and instead saturates the ground level.

"This particular area has had, relatively speaking, a high water level. We have been experiencing a lot of recharge and above-normal precipitation and it's really causing a rise in the water table," said Stephen Terracciano, a hydrologist from the U.S. Geological Survey who spoke at the meeting.

The National Weather Service in Upton said rainfall for the summer has been higher than normal.

Fred Gorman, chairman of the Nesconset Sachem Civic Association, helped put this meeting together because, he said, residents dealing with these issues are tired of promises from government officials. Sixteen officials from all three towns, the county, and representatives from the offices of Sen. Hillary Clinton and Rep. Tim Bishop (D-Southampton) attended.

"The time of studies is over," said Gorman, who added that the 1980 H2M, Drainage & Groundwater Relief Report released by the county is sufficient to solve the problem. "It's time for action."

He told the crowd, "You have to organize into a force."

Suffolk Legis. John M. Kennedy (R-Nesconset), said he knows "people are looking for solutions." He said the banding together of a residents' group will help get the federal money needed to solve the flooding problems.