

NORTHPORT

Protest of tax challenge

Critics: Schools would be harmed if assessment cut

BY MARK HARRINGTON
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Public officials and angry residents rallied in heavy rain beneath the Northport power plant Monday to protest LIPA's decadelong challenge of the plant's \$84 million annual property taxes and demand Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo intervene.

More than 100 residents and officials braved the afternoon rain with the power plant stacks as their backdrop while calling for LIPA to end tax challenges they said would "devastate" the Northport-East Northport school district and others like it across Long Island. It's one of a series of protests as the prospect of a court verdict nears.

"We're fighting back with everything we have," said Huntington Supervisor Chad Lupinacci, who said LIPA was "not negotiating" a settlement in good faith, and has made "no counter offers" to the town offering between \$130 million and \$200 million in savings over longer periods than LIPA's proposed nine-year settlement. A LIPA victory



Officials and Northport residents rally near the power plant Monday.

in the tax challenges would be "catastrophic," he said.

A senior LIPA official responded, "Our goal remains putting an unsustainable situation back on a sustainable path for the local community and the rest of LIPA's 1.1 million customers."

The protest comes as LIPA and Huntington Town are to return to court next month in what is expected to be the last phase of a trial that seeks a substantial reduction in the assessed value

of the plant. LIPA values the plant as low as \$198 million, and has presented hundreds of pages of evidence and expert testimony to challenge the town's assessment of \$3.4 billion. Mediation thus far has failed.

Suffolk County Comptroller John Kennedy said a successful tax challenge by LIPA would also impact county finances, because Suffolk would have to make LIPA whole for upward of \$650 million in tax refunds in

its favor for the year before it could seek to collect back taxes from Huntington.

Lupinacci said his office has reached out to Cuomo to intervene in the matter but "he's not willing to meet with me." A spokesman for Cuomo's office didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Residents who are concerned taxes will skyrocket as a result of a loss in court or a settlement have been protesting for months about LIPA's actions.

Paul Darrigo, a Northport resident who is leading a group called Concerned Citizens Against LIPA, last week released new calculations for the impact of a proposed settlement by LIPA that shows residents' taxes would increase considerably higher than the \$15 a month LIPA estimates they would.

The group's calculations show a home with \$3,700 of assessed value (with a market value of around \$535,663) would see taxes jump \$37 a month the current tax year, and each year increase an amount that would eventually rise to \$63 by the last year of the settlement in 2026-27, including effects of inflation. By the last year of the settlement, these homeowners would be paying taxes that are \$4,656 higher than they were in 2019.

HEMPSTEAD

BOARD PICKS ACTING ASST. POLICE CHIEF

BY JESSE COBURN
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The Hempstead Village board of trustees on Monday voted to appoint a new acting assistant chief of police, days after the prior assistant chief retired.

The board voted 3-2 to appoint Kevin Colgan, a lieutenant in the department, to the position. Trustees LaMont Johnson and Jeffery Daniels voted against the appointment.

Colgan, a 26-year veteran of the agency, will replace Patrick Cooke, who retired Friday.

Mayor Don Ryan said Colgan will effectively lead the agency for the time being, as Chief Paul Johnson, who is unrelated to the trustee, and Deputy Chief Richard Holland are both under indictment on corruption charges.

Ryan said he supported Colgan's appointment because of his "experience, wide range of ability and leadership qualities."

Trustee Johnson declined to say why he voted against Colgan. Daniels said he voted against him because the resolution appointing Colgan did not specify the term in which he would serve in the new role.

Village Attorney Cherice Vanderhall said the contract for the position, which will specify the term of service and pay, has not yet been negotiated.

Colgan, 52, of Islip, was not present at the meeting. In an interview after the vote, he said he was "happy that things went our way, and I'm looking forward to getting started."

Chris Giardino, the department's union president, said there is no civil service exam for assistant chief, but Colgan was the second-highest scorer on the most recent civil service exam for chief.

Colgan was paid \$226,400 last year, including \$41,000 in overtime, payroll records show.

OAK BEACH

Planned water treatment plant delayed again

BY RACHEL O'BRIEN
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Plans for a new public water system in Babylon's Oak Beach community are delayed again as officials await the state's approval on a water treatment plant, leaving residents without potable water for at least another year.

Residents of the 200 houses there get tap water from a system of wells that in recent years have been linked to three E. coli outbreaks.

Babylon's plan includes building a water treatment plant to connect three of the wells that service 59 properties, including a community center.

The project was initially projected to begin in 2018, but

town officials said in December that was behind schedule, expected to kick off in 2019 and be completed by winter 2019.

Now, the project is behind schedule again while officials await approvals from the state Department of Health, and the soonest it could be completed is June 2020, town officials said.

The project has been discussed for two decades, Suffolk County Department of Health Services spokeswoman Grace Kelly-McGovern said, but the department has recently prioritized the work because of the compromised water quality. It requires the town, which owns the land and leases it to homeowners, to make system changes.

The 59 houses and a community center that must connect to

the treatment plant will do so because they are among groups of five or more homes connected to a single well and considered a public water system, which the county water authority regulates.

In late May, the town notified residents that a 2018 water quality report for the Oak Beach system found high levels of iron in the three wells. But that's not why a "do not drink" order has been in effect since June 2017, town officials said.

"The biggest problem isn't the water, it's the distribution system," said Joe Guarino, principal environmental analyst for Babylon Town.

The unpressurized system could allow contaminants to enter at any time, he said, adding that the order will re-