



MEMO

To: Bourne Select Board

Cc: Bourne Town Administrator, Marlene McCollem

From: Betsy Hanson, CEO of the Cape Cod & Islands Association of REALTORS®

Date: May 27, 2025

Topic: Bourne's Decision to not file a Watershed Permit NOI for Megansett-Squeteague & Phinney's Harbors

The Cape and Islands Association of REALTORS® (CCIAOR) supports clean water infrastructure as one of our top priorities across our region, and it is a significant focus of our advocacy work.

On behalf of our members who live and work in Bourne, we were concerned to learn that the Town of Bourne does not intend to file a Notice of Intent (NOI) for a Watershed Permit for Megansett-Squeteague and Phinney's Harbors, which MassDEP has designated as Nitrogen Sensitive Areas.

At this point, Bourne is the only town on Cape Cod that hasn't filed a NOI. Once a NOI is in place, the town will have 20 years to create and implement wastewater solutions to reduce nitrogen pollution. If the NOI is not filed by July 7, 2025 - approximately six weeks away - the responsibility to reduce nitrogen pollution falls solely on 1,418¹ homeowners in Megansett-Squeteague and Phinney's Harbors. Without a 20-year extension, homeowners will be forced to upgrade their current Title 5 systems to Innovative/Alternative Septic Systems (I/A systems) regardless of the age or state of their current system by July 7, 2030.

The cost of installation, maintenance and monitoring will be cost prohibitive and there is still doubt that I/A systems can reduce nitrogen levels required by MassDEP.

Why would the town abdicate its responsibility to work with homeowners over the next 20 years to find a more environmentally- and cost-effective way to reduce nitrogen pollution in Megansett-Squeteague and Phinney's Harbors? While there is still time, we request that the Bourne Select file a NOI with MassDEP before the deadline.

We believe that relying on Innovative/Alternative Septic Systems (I/A Systems) will be cost prohibitive for homeowners and will not produce the nitrogen reduction levels that MassDEP requires. Here are some challenges with the current wastewater plan:

- **Without filing a NOI, a five-year deadline for I/A installation commences July 7, 2025.** With this timeline, 283² systems will need to be installed annually in these two watersheds alone. With only five companies currently approved by MassDEP to install General Use Approved I/A systems, how can homeowners find the equipment and companies to fulfill this tall order by

¹ Bourne CWMP Package Part 1 of 2 Executive Summary, pp.99-101 December 13, 2024.

² "Bourne CWMP Under Scrutiny by State Officials," [Capenews.net](https://www.capepodnews.net) (Bourne news), February 25, 2025.

2030? How realistic is it to assume that 5 companies will be able to simultaneously design, permit and install 56 I/A systems per year – a rate of more than one per week? Does Bourne have the staff to review and approve permits for the 283 installations?

- **If a NOI was filed, the annual number required would be reduced to 71³ systems annually as the timeline increases to 20 years to complete the work.** Extending the timeline would also allow Bourne to pursue other wastewater management systems such as sewers that are likely to end up being more cost-effective for homeowners and the town in the long run.
- **Are homeowners aware of the cost the Town's decision is placing on them?** There is a lack of equity with this decision since homeowners on sewer will be subsidized by taxpayers, yet those forced to upgrade to an I/A System are not given a financial subsidy from the town. Here are some costs to consider:
 - **I/A Septic Systems average \$50,000 for the cost of installation.** ⁴
 - There are additional costs for the systems such as engineering reports, landscaping, and permitting.
 - The requirement of annual inspection reports which average \$4,000 annually⁵. The homeowner is also responsible for the repair, maintenance, and replacement of their system.
 - With the anticipated demand for I/A systems in Bourne and elsewhere, will there be enough companies to supply the I/A systems in a timely and affordable manner?
- **I/A systems need consistent waste flow to operate efficiently.** There are many seasonal homes located near Phinney's Harbor and Megansett-Squeteague Harbor, so the nitrogen reduction levels will most likely not be met.
- **Make sewer systems a priority rather than a backup plan.** Currently, upgrading the Bourne Middle School WWTF to increase treatment and effluent discharge capacity, located within the Phinney's Harbor watershed, is considered a backup plan.⁶ This option, which would reduce the number of IA systems in the NSA, should be a priority in the town's CWMP.
- **Does the town have the staff to handle monitoring 1,418 homes for compliance and annual reporting to MassDEP after the I/A Systems were installed?**

We request that you file for a NOI for watershed permit by July 7, 2025, to remove the costly septic upgrade burden from homeowners. With six weeks until the deadline, we ask that the Select Board make filing a NOI a top priority. This would allow more time to analyze how a sewer system or other alternative approaches could be used in combination with I/A septic systems to reach the town's water quality goals. We also hope that you would pursue financial help for homeowners who are required to upgrade to I/A systems.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Eastham Assistant Town Manager Excel Worksheet Cost Comparison of I/A Systems vs. Municipal Sewers for Homeowners, Spring 2025 for June 2025 Special Town Meeting.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Town of Bourne - CWMP Recommended Plan Summary - May 2025, p.8