

# Wetlands station kept open

- **Suffolk is funding USGS Old Field monitoring post**
- **Fates of three others in Nassau are undetermined**

BY EMILY C. DOOLEY  
emily.dooley@newsday.com

Improved water quality monitoring and examination of wetland conditions will begin April 1 at Flax Pond in Old Field after the Suffolk County Legislature voted this week to fund a U.S. Geological Survey project.

The \$186,000 contract will

be paid out of the water quality protection and restoration program, which is funded through a quarter-percent sales tax.

The one-year contract allows the USGS to do real-time monitoring of tidal levels, salinity, dissolved oxygen, water temperature and acidity in the 146-acre salt marsh, said Chris Schubert, a supervisory hydrologist with the USGS Water Sci-

ence Center in Coram.

"This project will provide information critical to protect and restore tidal wetlands and shellfish, finfish and crustacean habitats in this fragile but magnificent environmental sanctuary," Legis. Kara Hahn (D-Setauket) said in a statement.

Monitoring at the site dates back to 2008 but because of funding cuts, the USGS has recently been measuring only tidal levels and temperatures, downloading the data every two months.

"Having Suffolk County come in and kind of adopt this

station and work with us to operate it . . . is great," Schubert said. "It's exciting."

The station is one of four USGS locations on the North Shore measuring water quality and tidal wetland conditions. Monitoring at the three others, all in Nassau County, is funded through March 31, Schubert said.

The stations are at East Creek in Sands Point, West Pond in Glen Cove and Frost Creek in Lattingtown.

The agency is talking with the state Department of Environmental Conservation in

hopes of securing funding to keep the stations operating, Schubert said.

DEC is requesting a grant from the Long Island Sound Study but, if approved, money would not become available until October, DEC spokeswoman Lori Severino said in an email.

Nassau County did not respond to a request for comment about funding the monitoring.

The data collected will help provide a glimpse into how rising sea levels and erosion affect marshlands, which act as storm surge buffers.

## Garden City board votes to lay off 6 firefighters

BY AISHA AL-MUSLIM  
aisha.al-muslim@newsday.com

The Garden City Village board has voted to lay off one-fifth of its professional firefighters, a decision that caused an uproar from residents, firefighters and their families at the board's meeting Thursday night.

Six paid firefighters will be laid off and one lieutenant demoted to firefighter after the board's 6-2 vote. The effective termination and demotion dates have yet to be determined, officials said.

"My career has peaked, but these young men have families," said Lt. Frank Roca, a 23-year department member who will be demoted. "My heart is breaking for these guys."

Mayor Donald T. Brudie and trustee Andrew J. Cavanaugh voted against the layoffs. The six board members who approved the layoffs as a cost-cutting move — John J. Watras, Nicholas P. Episcopia, Lawrence J. Quinn, Dennis C. Donnelly, Brian C. Daughney and John A. DeMaro — avoided eye contact with the audience of more than 150 people, some of whom shouted, "Shame on you," while others cried.

"I am opposed to reducing the staff of a department charged with lifesaving and property protection responsibilities," Brudie said.

The 92-year-old hybrid department — overseen by the vil-

“This is a huge economic saving.”

— Gerard Fishberg, village attorney

“I am opposed to reducing the staff of a department charged with lifesaving and property protection responsibilities.”

— Mayor Donald T. Brudie, who voted against the layoffs

lage — has four paid lieutenants, 31 paid firefighters and about 100 volunteer members, who augment their paid colleagues. The layoffs will leave the force with three lieutenants and 26 firefighters, including three who are on disability, Village Attorney Gerard Fishberg said in an interview after the meeting.

"This is a huge economic saving," said Fishberg, adding the village would save \$950,000 a year and only needs a minimum of 18 firefighters a day. "In simple terms, this comes down to overstaffing."

Many residents and firefighters at the meeting complained the board rushed to make a decision without proper notice to the community and failed to explain the reason for the cuts. They alleged the action was in retaliation for the fire department publishing advertisements in community newspapers criticizing the board before the village's runoff elections Jan. 29.

Firefighters said the move will save \$107 a year per household.

"I can't believe that is the

price we are willing to save to maybe put residents at risk," said resident George Sanders, a former Hempstead Fire Department chief, as the audience clapped in support.

Resident Leo Stimmmer applauded the move. "I want to thank you for taking this action because senior citizens like me can't afford it," he told the board. "I think this took a lot of courage."

After the meeting, some trustees said the board has changed its previous position about eliminating nighttime staff at the Edgemere Road and Clinton Road stations. They said both satellite stations and headquarters on Stewart Avenue would be manned 24 hours a day, but staffing would be reduced.

Paid firefighters have argued that staffing reductions and station closings could jeopardize public and firefighters' safety.

"The volunteers can't provide the same high-class service without us," said Peter Thorp, a seven-year firefighter being laid off. "It is a two-way street."

Ten-HUT!



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