



The Cape Cod Chronicle

Flanagan: Brewster Ponds Coalition ‘Cutting Edge’

by Rich Eldred

August 14, 2024

As published in *The Cape Cod Chronicle*, August 14, 2024. © *The Cape Cod Chronicle*.



First Barnstable District State Representative Chris Flanagan addresses the Brewster Pond Coalition Saturday. RICH ELDRED PHOTO

BREWSTER – Brewster’s ponds have been around since this sand spit was left by the glaciers and the ice blocks in the kettle holes melted.

But the Brewster Ponds Coalition has only been around for a decade, celebrating its tenth anniversary Saturday morning at the Cape Cod Bible Alliance Church on Route 6A.

First Barnstable District State Representative Chris Flanagan, D-Dennis, who represents Brewster, was the featured speaker and highlighted legislative initiatives that could benefit the town’s efforts on water quality.

“I don’t want to say the government is here to help, but the government is here to help,” he joked. “I view our

role as to support the great work of organizations like the Brewster Ponds Coalition. We do that through complementing the work you do and funding to make sure you get the work you want done.”

Flanagan noted he lives in Dennis, where he was a selectman, near Fresh Pond. He highlighted the state’s Title 5 regulations for alternative septic systems on Cape Cod and building sewer systems for towns.

“I did file legislation to help with a funding strategy around that,” Flanagan said. “Most communities have access to the state revolving fund. That allows them to borrow at zero to 2 percent interest. Cape Cod has a billion dollar infrastructure problem. I’ve filed legislation to help fund that.”

That fund is for building sewers, and Brewster hasn’t planned on much of that, although the town may construct a treatment plant.

“To get things over the finish line we do need your support,” Flanagan told the BPC.

He said he’s filed a \$25,000 earmark for the BPC to help fund the work they are doing on alternative septic systems that could remove phosphorus.

“The work you are doing is so cutting edge,” Flanagan said. “Kudos to you. You are a small but mighty group.”

“A couple of other things: Holtec (owner of the Pilgrim Nuclear plant) and dumping hazardous waste into Cape Cod Bay — the Mass DEP (Department of Environmental Protection) has rejected permit after permit Holtec has filed, so DEP is holding Holtec’s feet to the fire,” Flanagan continued.

He also cited his opposition to the machine gun range at Joint Base Cape Cod due to Cape Cod’s sole-source aquifer, and said he and other Cape legislators had sent a letter to state officials on the topic and will meet with them.

He also put an earmark in for The Friends of Bass River to convert cranberry bogs back to wetlands.

“Brewster water quality is the best. It has the lowest amount of PFAs. Keep up the great work Brewster,” Flanagan declared.

Many of these initiatives are in the Environmental Bond bill that is still in process and contains funding for alternative septic systems and the Cape Cod Water Protection Fund, or in a climate bill also in process, so Flanagan again asked for support to push them through.

Flanagan belongs to the Coastal Caucus in the legislature. “We try to give municipalities what they need to make sound judgements on coastal resiliency issues,” he said. “The government has created a director of coastal resiliency and we have a meeting planned to talk with him or her about legislation that could be filed.”

Finally, he gave the BPC a citation from the legislature congratulating the group on its 10th anniversary.

The BPC’s citizen science program includes 53 volunteers who sample 20 Brewster ponds every two weeks until Oct. 30. Samples are sent to the Association to Preserve Cape Cod for testing for cyanobacteria toxins. When the information comes in from the Barnstable County lab and APCC, the Brewster Department of Health decides whether to post an advisory at the pond. The BPC expects to collect 250 samples this summer and fall.

This season advisories have been posted at Upper and Lower Mill Pond after algal blooms were detected on July 8. There were no use restrictions last year.

The BPC partnered with the town to construct an equipment shed on Long Pond. The group has also assisted neighborhood associations in remediation projects such as collecting runoff at Seymour Pond. The education committee has provided pond kits to Brewster’s two elementary schools, a project that was capped by an end-of-the-year field trip to Long Pond. The group also purchased two computerized microscopes to aid in research and education and awarded two scholarships.

The coalition has advocated for a comprehensive wastewater plan for Brewster, conducted two tours of the wastewater plant in Orleans last year and hosted a talk on neighborhood wastewater treatment plants such as Brewster is considering for the Long Pond Sea Camp property.

The group held forums on water quality related articles before the spring town meeting and were pleased when they passed.

“The comprehensive plan for Brewster will now have a section for wastewater,” observed BPC President Susan Bridges.

She listed the priorities for the coming year as supporting plans for the Sea Camp properties that improve water quality; funding a town wide wastewater plan; completing a pond management plan; supporting permitting for remediation projects; and working with the public works department on water projects.

Last year the BPC took in \$94,000 and has a balance of \$223,000. The group is looking at funding a study on phosphorus in ponds.

Nancy Ortiz, Mary Mauterstock and Marty Burke have stepped down from the governing board and longtime member and BPC cofounder Gwen Pelletier was given the Splash Award for her contributions to the BPCC.