



The Chairman's Corner

by

Matt B. Murell

Matt.Murell@ColumbiacountyNY.com

SANITARY CODE

5/6/25

With the adoption by the Columbia County Board of Supervisors of County Law #3 of 2025 at its April meeting, changes are on the way in the manner home septic systems are administered by the Columbia County Health Department.

The new law took effect May 1. It can be read by visiting the "Columbia County Board of Supervisors" page on the county website (columbiacountyny.com) and clicking on "Local Laws."

As stated in the new law, known as the Columbia County Sanitary Code: "The purpose of this chapter is to set forth regulations and standards for the safe management and disposal of on-site waste. It is hereby declared to be the health policy of the Columbia County Department of Health to protect the quality of water supplies by ensuring the proper installation of sewage disposal systems."

The most often-heard questions with the new law have revolved around what is changing, and why.

County Health Department Environmental Health Director Magnolia McBroom explained that prior to the development of the Sanitary Code, "Anyone who would like to build a home in Columbia County submitted a single-lot sewage disposal system to our department," which would then undergo analysis from Health Department, including soil suitability. After that, someone at the DoH would design and inspect the system prior to closure.

Under the new policy, she said, all single-lot sewage disposal applications will need to be submitted to the county Health Department with engineering reports and plans prepared by a New York State-licensed engineer. With that, a representative of the county Health Department will perform a site visit to determine that the suitability of the soils is consistent with the submitted plans, then will return to do a final inspection.

"The standards aren't changing as far as the design for a septic system goes," said Environmental Health Director McBroom. "We haven't made it any more strict or anything like that. We still have to follow the New York State design handbook."

She said that in recent times "most of the applications that have been coming in even before this recent law were accompanied by an engineer's plans. I think many folks who are building new homes are taking it upon themselves to do this, or their general contractor is doing it for them."

County Health and Human Services Committee Chairman Donal Collins (Chatham) said that much of the new law is a matter of "shoring up standards and being specific to regional concerns."

He thanked those who "invested a lot of time in this, including Commissioner of Public Works Ray Jurkowski and the county Department of Health."

Also sitting on the committee are Deputy Chair Kathy Eldridge (Greenport), Rob Lagonia (Austerlitz), David Helsley (Germantown), Abdus Miah (Hudson-2nd Ward), Randall Martin (Hudson-1st Ward), Brenda Adams (Canaan), Ron Knott (Stuyvesant), and myself (Stockport).