

Region's towns team up to monitor rivershed health

by **Caitlin Shapiro**

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Area towns are taking a collaborative and interactive approach to improving the quality of, and educating the public about, river watershed health.

At a July 13 kick-off meeting of the South Western Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), more than 20 representatives from Weston, New Canaan, Darien, Greenwich, Westport, Stamford and Norwalk met to discuss the creation of "watershed-based management plans" for the Five Mile, Mianus and Saugatuck river watersheds. A substantial plan for the Norwalk River watershed is already in the works.

Weston lies within the Saugatuck River watershed. The over-arching goal is to improve the water quality in these three rivers, which ultimately empty into Long Island Sound. The plans are being funded in part by the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) through the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Clean Water Act.

One of the problems plaguing the local rivers is pollution, due in large part to fertilizer and pesticide use. At the meeting, Bob Wagman of Norwalk described how a neighbor was dumping various scraps into the river behind his house. The neighbor was eventu-

ally cited for his actions and cleaned up the mess, but Mr. Wagman emphasized, "It was done out of ignorance. He didn't know you can't put stuff in the river."

"We have the knowledge about streams, but not the local knowledge," he said.

Mr. Wagman also described his concern over flooding issues, exacerbated by the amount of sediment that has built up on the river beds.

Several other issues, identified by SWRPA member Tom Failla of Weston, include road sanding and the failure to clean it up after the season, and also, the maintenance of catch basins.

One of the goals of this comprehensive regional effort is to increase awareness about river health issues, and teach residents about the specific qualities that make these bodies of water valuable, while at the same time, learning about how residents use and value the rivers themselves.

Office regional planner Nicole Davis of SWRPA will be working with Shandor Szalay and Graham Trelstad of AKRF, an environmental, planning and engineering consulting group.

"This [effort] is as much about building this community as it is about the document at the end," Mr. Szalay said. "We look forward to getting down to the specifics."

Plans for the next few months include completing



Margaret Wittenberg
From left, Mike Aurilia of Greenwich, Alicia Mozian of Westport, and Tom Failla of Weston were among the more than two dozen river preservation advocates at the SWRPA kick-off meeting for watershed-based management planning for the Mianus, Five-Mile, and Saugatuck rivers.

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