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Water officials push for filtration plants

By **John Hilliard**/ Staff Writer
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Water Department officials told selectmen on Monday night that two proposed filtration plants are critical to curbing future contamination of the water supply.

"It's a big step having that back you up," said Board of Water Commissioners Chairman Robert Duffy, adding that a proposed plant for Baldwin Pond could clean the entire town's essential water supply in an emergency, meaning all indoor water use but excluding landscaping.

The water commissioners' call comes after the state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) required the town to conduct additional testing and new filtration standards for Wayland's water.

Samples of the town's water tested positive for coliform bacteria in September and October. Wayland has sent out public notices about positive tests of coliform bacteria three times this year.

Coliform bacteria is not dangerous in low concentrations, but the DEP uses it as an indicator that a problem could exist within a water treatment or distribution system.

Water Commissioners recently met with DEP officials, and Duffy said the state is looking closely at how Wayland maintains its water.

"We had a real frank discussion about what's going on," said Duffy, adding that DEP officials are "on top of it and peppering us with questions."

Officials are blaming Wayland's recent water woes on higher-than-normal rain levels over the past year.

"All the rain we got ... brought the groundwater level so high, it just (allowed) the bacteria in," said Acting Water Superintendent David Fields.

Fields said a proposed plant for Baldwin Pond - currently undergoing a \$300,000 design process approved by Town Meeting - would provide ultraviolet screening for bacteria, filtering out contaminants in the water supply.

The additional cleaning would also curb the high levels of chlorine currently being used to keep the water safe from bacteria.

Duffy said commissioners hope to ask for funding - estimated at \$5 million - to build the Baldwin Pond plant at the annual Town Meeting in April.

If the project goes forward, commissioners are also eyeing a similar filtration plant for the Happy Hollow well, at an estimated cost of \$2.3 million.

Duffy said commissioners hope to keep costs down on the Happy Hollow plant by duplicating the construction of the Baldwin Pond plant.

Having two plants in place would provide constant decontamination and filtration for the water supply, he said.

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