

Lake George Septic System Inspection Program FAQ

1. What is a septic system?

A septic system is an underground wastewater treatment technology used for areas without access to centralized sewer systems. Septic systems generally consist of a tank and drain field, though they come in many different designs. The septic tank accepts waste from the building's plumbing, captures the solids in the septic tank, and allows the liquid waste to be dispersed via a distribution box and drain lines. Liquid waste is dispersed into an underground drainage field and infiltrates safely into the ground away from drinking water sources.



2. How do I know if I have a septic system?

If you pay a utility rate to your municipality for sewer or wastewater, you likely do not have a septic system. Check your water utility bill or contact your local wastewater district to determine if you are serviced. You can also verify if you have a septic system by reviewing your Town's records. Below are links to the Lake George counties' tax map parcel viewers which allow you to search whether your property has private septic or public sewer.

Warren County: <https://imo.warrencountyny.gov/index.aspx>

Essex County: <https://rpts-imo.co.essex.ny.us/IMO/index.aspx>

Washington County: <https://imo.washingtoncountyny.gov/>

3. Why is the Park Commission inspecting septic systems?

A properly designed, sited, and maintained septic system that meets current NYSDOH standards will effectively remove pollutants and bacteria from wastewater before they reach waterways. However, the age of some systems and the relatively small lot size of properties around the Lake make a malfunctioning system a major risk to human health and water quality. Septic inspections will help ensure that systems are working adequately, to protect public health and the quality of Lake George. Many local and statewide similar efforts have identified that many septic systems currently in place are not well maintained or have broken or failing components. This program will help to identify these issues and ultimately have them corrected, protecting public health and the quality of Lake George.

4. What is the process that the Commission followed to create this program?

In July of 2021 the Park Commission formed an ad-hoc committee comprised of 14 members of the public including local elected officials, engineers, code enforcement officers and the business community to help guide this effort. This committee is currently active, working with the Commission to identify the need for such a program and how an inspection program could work for Lake George. Considerable research into the many existing lake-based septic system inspection programs throughout New York State has been very helpful to get a clear understanding of the benefit and need for such programs. This is supplemented by a scientific literature review of septic systems and spatial analysis of septic systems within the Lake George Park. This quantitative research allowed the Commission to support regulations with peer reviewed science and obtain a

count of all systems in the Park requiring inspection. Summaries of all ad-hoc meetings, plus all scientific studies and analyses can be found on the Commission website.

5. What properties will be inspected?

All properties that have septic systems within 500 feet from the lake shoreline and 100 feet from all DEC regulated streams flowing into Lake George are proposed to be inspected once every five years, along with a pumpout of the septic tank by a certified hauler.

6. Who can I contact for a pump-out of my septic tank?

Septic tanks should be pumped out every 3-5 years on average, to keep the system functioning properly. A DEC certified septage hauler is your best hands-on knowledge of septic tanks and proper maintenance. There are many septic haulers in the Lake George region. A quick internet search will yield several results. An average septic system pumpout costs between \$200-\$400 depending on the size of the tank.

7. Who would be inspecting my septic system?

Inspections will be performed by a trained staff member of the Lake George Park Commission, in combination with the septic hauler company onsite. All inspections will be conducted during the septic tank pumpout, scheduled by the property owner.

8. How much will this cost me?

Property owners with septic systems within the inspection program area would be charged \$50 per year for residential homes and \$100 per year for commercial properties. Property owners with 'holding tanks' will be charged \$25 due to the lower complexity and time associated with inspection. The cost of the septic tank pumpout is paid separately by the property owner. An annual bill will be sent to all property owners in the program area in March of each year.

9. How will I know when I need an inspection?

Park Commission staff will reach out to you the year of your inspection. Property owners will schedule a septic hauler to come pump out their septic tank and uncover the distribution box and inform the Commission of when that will take place. The Commission will attend the pumpout and conduct the inspection at that time. As part of the inspection, the inspector will require the property owner or agent to run all plumbing fixtures to determine if there is continuity from the pipes to the tank and no illicit discharge of untreated wastewater (i.e., greywater).

10. What is the typical inspection process like?

1. **Uncover System Elements:** Tank inlet and outlet ports, any distribution box, any seepage pits/drywells, pump stations and must be uncovered by the landowner, their representative, or hauler prior to inspection. Typically, this activity occurs on the day of inspection, which is why Commission staff stagger their arrival time as noted above.
2. **Review Water Flow:** By regulation as well as standard professional practice, the review of a wastewater system includes running water fixtures to (a) see how liquid levels in the system react, and (b) confirm that all fixtures drain to the system. Please note, turning on water fixtures and concurrently confirming that effluent is flowing through the system may require

coordination between Commission staff, the hauler, and the landowner or responsible individual present.

3. **Pump-Out:** Following review of water flow noted above, Commission staff must witness the wastewater tank being pumped-out by a DEC registered septic hauler. It is important that the system is not pumped in advance of Commission staff's arrival; this would necessitate a new inspection date.
4. **System Sizing:** Per DOH and DEC, system loading is gauged by the number of Bedrooms, Garbage Grinder/Disposal, and Jacuzzi/Spas associated with a wastewater system. Using available real property data as the baseline of information, staff will inquire about these features.
5. **System Location:** Staff will seek to gain an understanding of the layout of the system on the property and its position relative to any nearby water resources (i.e., Permanent Structures, Lake, Streams).

11. What happens if my septic system fails inspection?

If a system is found to have any broken components or simple corrections needed, most septic haulers are able to conduct those repairs within a short amount of time. Systems that have larger issues such as failing infiltration beds will require additional work. All major septic system upgrades require an engineer to be involved and a municipal entity to approve.

Systems that are found to be undersized or not meeting current design standards will be required to be upgraded before the next inspection period (five years to upgrade). Systems that may be substandard but have received permits from the local town or county will not be required to be upgraded.

12. Will holding tanks be treated differently than conventional septic systems?

The inspection will largely be the same, on a five-year recurring basis. However, the annual fee for properties on holding tanks is anticipated to be \$25 per year as opposed to \$50 for regular systems, due to the lesser time and complexity associated with holding tanks.

13. What if my septic system needs to be replaced but my lot cannot meet the current regulations' standards?

Property owners whose septic systems are found to be failing and must be upgraded have the right to apply for a Variance Request to the approving authority (town board or county). In this process, applicants would need to show why current standards cannot be met on their property and how the new design is as compliant as possible.

14. If I need to upgrade or replace my system, who do I go to for approval?

Nothing is changing from the current system in place. For efficiency to the landowner, the Park Commission is conducting the inspections, but all septic system replacements and upgrades will be approved by the current authority, either the town or county.

15. Do I still need to have an inspection if I have already had my septic system inspected through the towns of Queensbury and Bolton's programs?

Participation in Queensbury or Bolton's programs for septic system inspection at property transfer will be a suitable substitute for an LGPC inspection for five years. After this time, properties will join onto the recurring 5-year LGPC inspection schedule.

16. Who can I contact for additional questions about the Lake George Septic System Inspection Program?

The Park Commission staff are always happy to speak with the Lake George community about this important program. Feel free to call the office at 518-668-9347 or email staff at info@lgpc.state.ny.us.