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"Where there is no vision, the people perish."

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OPINION

EDITORIAL

A slick solution for used grease

Ever wonder what happens to the grease that's left after the fast-food restaurant cooks your burger and fries? If you're thinking it's difficult to get rid of, you're right. Grease is hard to process, gums up many sewage treatment plants, and often ends up in landfills, where it decomposes and releases methane, which contributes to global warming.

A sewer district in Great Neck is proposing a different way to dispose of it, one that is far better for the environment and, as a bonus, has the potential to save the district and its taxpayers money.

Our nation produces about 500 million gallons of grease a year, nearly half of that from fast-food restaurants. Great Neck's plan anticipates processing 1,300 gallons a day. Combined with more-established initiatives to convert cooking oil and grease to biofuel, it points the way to a cleaner and more enlightened future.

The proposal from the Great Neck Water Pollution Control District builds on its new state-of-the-art plant. The facility is unique on Long Island in that it uses anaerobic bacteria — which need no oxygen — to break down biodegradable materials in wastewater. A \$2-million addition would allow the plant to take in grease from local restaurants and add it to the sludge already being processed. The benefits are many.

Grease is high-energy food for anaerobes; more active bacteria break down more sludge, leaving less residue to be trucked off-Island. That means cheaper trucking costs and fewer vehicles on the road. A by-product of the digestion process is methane, used to power the plant's microturbines; adding grease will help produce about 25 percent of the plant's electricity needs and reduce the amount of fossil fuels that would have been burned to supply that power. The fees received from carters who collect grease from restaurants should cover the cost of the bond to build the addition. The bond will need approval from the North Hempstead Town Board, which should say yes.

The Great Neck district earlier this year cut the ribbon on its new plant, the result of consolidating with a village facility in a way that is cutting pollution and saving taxpayers money. Now Great Neck is leading the way again. **N**