



Town of Westford

# Stormwater Utility Enterprise Fund

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

SPRING 2019

## Westford 2019 Annual Town Meeting

The cost of stormwater management is rising for Massachusetts cities and towns due to new state and federal regulations and aging drainage systems (pipes and other structures, also called infrastructure) that will require more maintenance and replacement with every passing year. Many communities across the Commonwealth and the nation have evaluated various funding alternatives to pay for these costs that strive to be as fair and reliable as possible. Westford has compared stormwater funding alternatives as part of the ongoing efforts of our Stormwater Management Master Plan (SWMMP) and is now exploring the details of creating an Enterprise Fund and a possible stormwater fee, with input from town departments, decision-makers, and the public. **At the 2019 Annual Town Meeting, residents will be asked to vote on the creation of an Enterprise Fund – an accounting mechanism to ensure revenue is dedicated solely to stormwater management costs.**



Clean water begins with YOU.

## Why Should We Care About Stormwater?

Stormwater runoff comes from rain and snowmelt that flows over land or hard surfaces, such as paved streets, parking lots, and building rooftops, or soaks into the ground. Stormwater affects every resident and business. It impacts public health, safety, travel, quality of life, and the local economy. Stormwater management is important to:

**Provide a Safe, Adequate Drinking Water Supply.** All of Westford's drinking water (public and private) comes from groundwater. Rain and snowmelt must slowly soak into the ground to replenish groundwater. As forests and meadows are converted to lawns, pavement, and buildings, runoff increases and becomes polluted while groundwater recharge decreases.

**Prevent Local Flooding.** When drainage systems are not proactively maintained or have not been designed for denser development, stormwater can cause flooding in streets, homes, and businesses.

**Keep Local Waters Clean.** Stormwater is the single largest contributor of pollutants to local waterbodies. As it travels across land, stormwater collects pollutants and debris, like trash, pet waste, fertilizers, dirt and sediment, and car oil and antifreeze. These pollutants flow into storm drains and catch basins in roadways and parking lots and are discharged, untreated, into our local waterbodies. This causes harm to our rivers, streams and lakes, which we value for their beauty, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat. Beaver Brook, Stony Brook, and Tadmuck Brook do not currently meet Clean Water Act goals for human and wildlife uses due to stormwater pollution.

**Meet Federal Requirements.** Since 2003 the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) has regulated stormwater discharges from Westford's drainage system through the Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems (MS4) permit. Starting July 1, 2018, the updated MS4 permit requires communities to do considerably more work to manage stormwater runoff. This is detailed in *SWMMP Volume 4: NPDES Stormwater Program Compliance Plan* on the Engineering website.

## What is Stormwater Infrastructure?

Stormwater is collected and transported in a system of structures such as catch basins, pipes and culverts and discharged directly into local waterbodies. It does not receive treatment before it's discharged. Westford maintains over **\$150 million of stormwater drainage infrastructure** that protects personal property and allows safe travel. This includes nearly 300 culverts, 60 miles of drain pipes, about 6,000 drainage structures (catch basins and manholes), and over 600 outfalls where stormwater

flows into the environment. All of this drainage infrastructure needs to be inspected, cleaned, repaired, and replaced as it ages.

## How has Westford been Funding Stormwater Management?

The Town's stormwater program is currently managed by the Engineering and Highway Departments. Staff time, maintenance, repairs and upgrades have been paid for with tax revenue collected for the General Fund. Funding for stormwater competes with other local priorities such as education and public safety. The Town is limited on what it can raise in taxes without an override based on Proposition 2 ½. **The current level of funding is not sufficient to meet the minimum requirements and keep up with needed capital programs.**



*These corrugated metal pipes need replacement.  
(above – Concord Rd culvert and below – aging drainage pipe)*

## Anticipated Cost Increase

The Town's current annual stormwater program cost is approximately \$600,000. We estimate that an **additional \$1 million per year** is needed to meet future needs and requirements. The desired future level of service and corresponding budgets are still under consideration by the Board of Selectmen. While Westford is required to incur these costs, it does have choices about how to fund them.

## What Are the Benefits of an Enterprise Fund?

An Enterprise Fund allows revenue to be collected and applied directly to stormwater-specific costs. Fees can accumulate for future capital projects. An Enterprise Fund improves transparency by tracking actual revenues and expenditures.

## What Does the Town Meeting Article Do and What Happens if It is Adopted?

Approval at Town Meeting is required to adopt the Stormwater Utility Enterprise Fund. If residents approve the Article, the Town will create the Enterprise Fund. In summer 2019, the Board of Selectmen will decide if a stormwater fee or property taxes will be used to fund the additional stormwater costs. **If a fee is selected, more information will be provided, and public meetings will be held to educate residents and businesses on the proposed stormwater fee and billing process.** Stormwater funding will continue to come from the General Fund in FY2020 and the proposed Enterprise Fund will go into effect on July 1, 2020 at the start of FY2021.

### **Scenario 1: If the Selectmen choose a stormwater fee:**

**FY2020:** The final details of rates, rate structure, billing, and administration will be determined.

**FY2021:** First stormwater utility bills will be collected.

### **Scenario 2: If Selectmen choose taxation:**

**FY2020:** Additional tax revenue will require the Town to seek an override at 2020 Annual Town Meeting.

**FY2021:** Additional taxation begins, or if an override fails, budgets and services will be reduced at this time.

## What Happens if We Choose Not to Fully Fund the Stormwater Program?

If the Town can't meet the requirements of the stormwater program, the USEPA may notify the Town that it is out of compliance with the MS4 permit. Non-compliance can result in being placed under a Consent Order by the USEPA, which means federal and judicial oversight of the Town, and the risk of hefty fines in the tens of thousands of dollars or more. Additional funding is also strongly recommended to fund capital programs that will proactively address known drainage issues, undersized or failing culverts and pipes, and water quality concerns.

## Where can I find more information and how can I be involved in the Plan?

To learn more, please visit us at [www.westfordma.gov/stormwater](http://www.westfordma.gov/stormwater). To be added to the stormwater email list for notices about upcoming public meetings or if you have questions, write to [stormwater@westfordma.gov](mailto:stormwater@westfordma.gov).