

Westford 2019 Annual Town Meeting Stormwater Utility Enterprise Fund Frequently Asked Questions

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.**



Why Should We Care About Stormwater? Stormwater runoff is generated from rain and snowmelt that flows over land or “impervious” (hard) surfaces, such as paved streets, parking lots, driveways, sidewalks and rooftops, or soaks into the ground through lawns, forests and meadows. 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. We need rain and snowmelt to be able to slowly soak into the ground to replenish our drinking water aquifers. 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 including public education, system-wide inspections and water quality testing, increased oversight of private development and construction, labor and equipment for more maintenance (such as street sweeping and cleaning catch basins and storm drains), and more. This is detailed in *SWMMP Volume 4: NPDES Stormwater Program Compliance Plan*.

What is Stormwater Infrastructure? Stormwater is not the same as sanitary sewage (from toilets, sinks, laundry), which is treated. 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. Infrastructure also



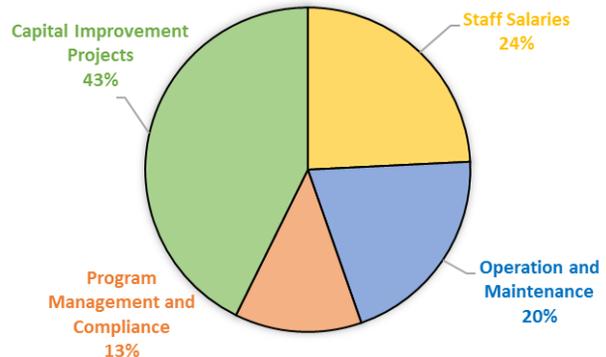
These corrugated metal pipes (above – Concord Rd culvert and below – drainage pipe) need replacement.

includes roadside swales and ditches and in many cases the roads themselves. All of this drainage infrastructure needs to be inspected, cleaned, repaired, and replaced as it ages. Additionally, there are water quality treatment structures, like detention ponds, that the Town must maintain by mowing, cleaning, and repairing.

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 are has 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, and the Town is also 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 even the minimum MS4 permit requirements and to keep up with needed capital programs.**

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. Enterprise funds are growing in popularity and the state recommends them as an accounting mechanism for stormwater management.



Proposed Budget Allocations for \$1.6 Million Program (Protective Level of Service)

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 the 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 does not have the funding to meet all the requirements of the stormwater program, the USEPA may notify the Town that they are 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, higher costs to comply with permit requirements, and the risk of hefty fines in the tens of thousands of dollars or more. **Additional funding is also strongly recommended to annually fund capital programs that will more proactively address known drainage issues, undersized or failing culverts and pipes, and water quality concerns.**

To learn more, please visit us at www.westfordma.gov/stormwater where additional information is available. To be added to the stormwater information contact list to receive email notices about upcoming public meetings or if you have questions, write to stormwater@westfordma.gov.