

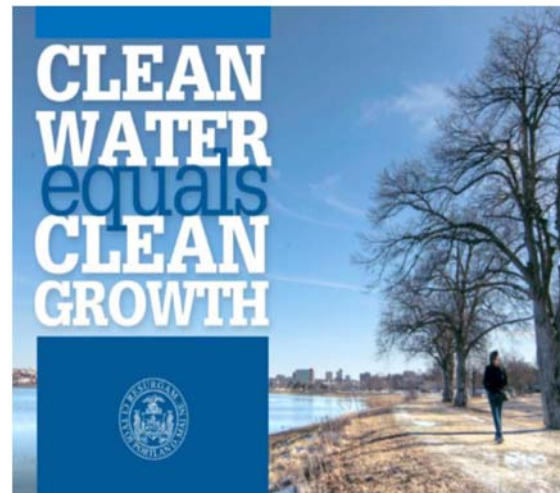


COASTAL COMMUNITY GRANTS: Stormwater Management

City of Portland Stormwater Outreach & Sewer Rate Change Project

“The effort and funding made available through the State of Maine and NOAA have been essential to the success of the City’s efforts in effectively communicating to the public related to very important issues: the combined sewer overflow issues the City faces along with the impact that stormwater and run-off has on the environment and the wallets of residents and businesses in the City of Portland.”

Ian Houseal, Sustainability Coordinator
City of Portland December 2012



PARTNERS

Casco Bay Estuary Partnership

PROJECT DESCRIPTION (completed December 2012)

Portland is considering moving toward a modified sewer system funding program linking sewer fees to both water use and runoff volumes. Currently, combined sewer abatement efforts are financed based on water use. Combined sewer overflows (CSO) are driven by urban runoff in excess of sewer system capacity, meaning that certain sewer rate payers (large water users) are bearing the largest burden for combined sewer abatement and stormwater management. The proposed billing system would include a separate fee based on the amount of runoff generated from a parcel. This fee would lower overall sewer rates for many businesses and spread the burden of paying for runoff and wastewater management more equitably. While the proposed system will lower annual sewer costs for many residents and businesses, any fee change requires effective communication about the rationale for those changes.

APPROACH

The approach taken through this outreach effort included stakeholder engagement, business community briefings, and general public outreach. The documents produced can be found at: www.portlandmaine.gov/sustainablestormwaterfunding.htm.

RESULTS

Outreach efforts to stakeholder groups included: briefing the Maine Department of Environmental Protection on the modified fee structure, inviting experts to review the proposed changes and engaging business associations in efforts to bring the proposal to the attention of the wider business community. A draft briefing package for

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businesses included a PowerPoint presentation, survey results and a fact sheet documenting the extent of sanitary, combined and stormwater infrastructure needs for sustainable growth. We sought support from these stakeholders for bringing the proposal to city business leaders. Numerous press articles and a website were designed to answer questions. The website includes a basic briefing package of relevant information and was developed prior to the first public hearing.

NEXT STEPS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Clean Water – Clean Growth outreach efforts were successful in getting City Council authorization for the City Administration to develop ordinance language, policy guidelines, and initiate the creation of a billing system to support the proposed modified fee structure. The proposed modifications to the fee structure went into effect on January 1, 2016. See <http://www.pressherald.com/2016/01/01/new-stormwater-fee-takes-effect-in-portland-on-friday/>

NEEDS

As the proposed fee is being implemented, the City expects to have a number of needs including: 1) continued outreach to business and residential communities to increase understanding about sewers and the impact of proposed modifications to sewer fee structure, 2) creation of a crediting mechanism and possible program including rebates for storm drain disconnections or rebates for the installation of rain barrels, and 3) support developing an ordinance that provides the authority to implement modifications to the fee structure.

LESSONS LEARNED

Sewer infrastructure investments are essential for long term viability of urban areas. Coastal urban development and redevelopment opportunities can be compromised or restricted due to inadequate or aging sewer infrastructure. Flooding and subsidence are the most visible challenges for coastal communities. Casco Bay and Portland's coastal waters continue to be polluted by inadequately controlled stormwater and CSO discharges. Failure of aging sewer infrastructure can damage roads, homes and businesses. Without solutions, the potential long-term impacts on the economy and environment will prove significant.

APPLICABILITY FOR OTHER MUNICIPALITIES

Other municipalities can use the materials produced through this effort and can learn the importance of public outreach about changing the way sewer systems are paid for.

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FY12 CCG-11
2.8.2017.

Financial assistance provided by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, U.S. Department of Commerce Grant CZM NA10NOS4190188 to the Maine Coastal Program. Coastal Community Grants are awarded and administered by the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Municipal Planning Assistance Program.

