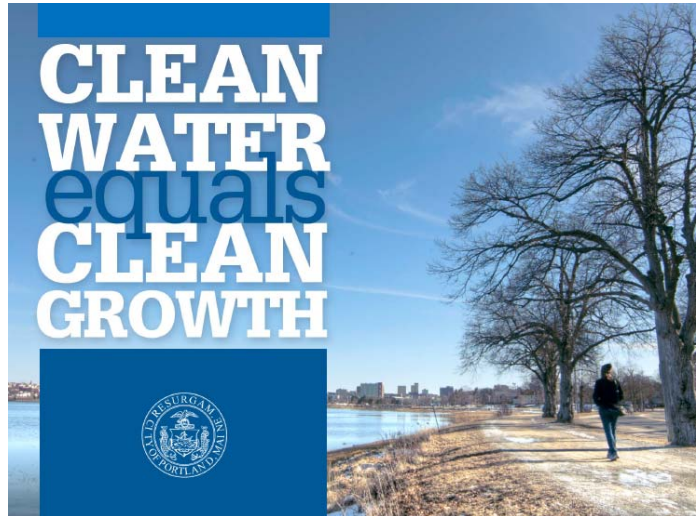


City of Portland
FY12 Maine Coastal Program Competitive Coastal Grant

Project Title: *Clean Water – Clean Growth*
Outreach

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Municipality: Portland, Maine

Grant Category: Ensuring Sustainable, Vibrant Coastal Communities; Preparing for Coastal Storms, Erosion and Flooding, Coastal Hazards; Addressing the Effects of Land Use Activity on Water Quality

Approach and Results: The City is actively considering moving towards a modified sewer system funding program that would change the way that sewer charges are billed. Currently, combined sewer abatement efforts are financed through sanitary sewer fees, which are assessed based on water use. The city's stormwater management efforts are currently also funded primarily through the City's sewer fund. Combined sewer overflows are driven by urban runoff in excess of sewer system capacity. What this means is that certain sewer ratepayers (large water users) are bearing the largest burden for combined sewer abatement and stormwater management costs but may not be contributing the largest portion of the problem. The modified billing system proposed would include an additional and separate sewer fee based on the amount of runoff generated from a parcel. This new, combined fee structure would lower overall sewer rates for many businesses and spread the burden of paying for runoff and wastewater management more equitably among all of those that contribute to the problem.

Linking fees to BOTH water use and runoff volumes is fundamentally more fair than the current system and will lower annual sewer costs for many residents and businesses in comparison to what they would experience without a change in fee structure. However, any change requires effective delivery of information about the rationale for changes in order to avoid community backlash about "new fees".

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

1. Stakeholder Engagement included briefing the Maine Department of Environmental Protection on the pending modified fee structure recommendations, briefing scientific and engineering experts and inviting them to review the proposed recommendations, and vouch for the

impervious cover assessments budget forecasts and other technical details on which the modified fee structure will be based; and briefing business associations, including the Chamber of Commerce, and inviting them to help bring the proposal to the attention of the wider business community and seek cooperation in briefing other parties under future phases of the plan.

2. Business Community Briefings included preparation a briefing package for the *Clean Water – Clean Growth* outreach effort and presentation of the package in draft form to the stakeholders. The briefing package included a PowerPoint presentation, previously conducted survey results, and a single page (double sided) fact sheet documenting the extent of sanitary, combined and stormwater infrastructure needs for sustainable growth and key points about the proposed changes that the City



Council will consider. The briefing package was geared towards the interests and objections anticipated from the business community based on outreach plan results. The goal of the meeting was to seek the involvement of these individuals in bringing the matter to the attention of city business leaders generally and to support effort at public briefings.

3. General Public Outreach included press outreach and the development of a website. Press Outreach included inviting reporters to tour sites around the city and hear stories from individuals on sewer related issues. Press outreach generated numerous articles in local papers. The website was prepared in anticipation of questions from businesses and residents. The website included a basic briefing package of relevant information and was developed prior to the first public hearing on the new sewer ordinance.

Next Steps/Opportunities: The efforts made to inform the business community and the general public through the *Clean Water – Clean Growth* outreach effort were successful in that the City Council through a public process including two hours of public testimony at a recent City Council meeting authorized the City Administration to take next steps to craft ordinance language, develop policy guidelines, and initiate the creation of a billing system to support the proposed modified fee structure. Over the next year, the City will work to implement the proposed modifications to the fee structure.

Needs: As the proposed fee is being implemented the City expects to have a number of needs including:

1. Continued public outreach support to the general public including the business community and the residential community to increase understanding about sewer issues in general and the impact that the proposed modifications to sewer fee structure will have on them.
2. Creation of a crediting mechanism and program surrounding that program possibly including rebates for storm drain disconnections to property owners or rebates for the installation of rain barrels.

3. Support in developing an ordinance that provides the authority to implement modifications to the fee structure.

Lessons Learned and Applicability for Other Municipalities:

Sewer infrastructure investments are essential for long-term viability of urban areas, yet to the average citizen, the topic is complex, confusing and is secondary to other, more visible issues such as education, roads and job creation. However, the reality is that coastal urban development and redevelopment opportunities can be compromised or restricted due to inadequate or aging sewer infrastructure. Flooding and subsidence are only the most visible part of a growing a challenge for coastal communities nationwide. Casco Bay and Portland's brooks and other coastal waters are continuing to be polluted by inadequately controlled stormwater and CSO discharges. Failure of aging sewer infrastructure can damage roads, homes and businesses. Without solutions, potential long-term impacts on economy and environment will prove significant for the city, region and state. Funding spent on public outreach surrounding the issue of sewer systems was money well spent for the City of Portland. Other municipalities can use the material produced through this effort as well as learn that public outreach is important especially when talking about changing the way the sewer system is paid for.

Quote from a Town on the Utility of the Effort: *[Please use any material provided above.]* 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 runoff has on the environment and the wallets of residents and businesses in the City of Portland.


Recommendation to the Maine Coastal Program for Follow-up by State Agencies to Address Identified Municipal and Regional Needs and Emerging Coastal Issues: Portland's coastal issues are covered well in the grant as written. Future grant submissions from the City may include support for CSO, stormwater, climate change, and sea-level rise.

Task Force Recommendation

Split the current fee into two parts.

Sewer fee pays for sewage system and half of combined system costs.

Stormwater fee pays for storm sewer and half of combined system costs.



CLEAN WATER equals CLEAN PEOPLE