



Water Infrastructure – Investing in our Future

Clean Water comes with a Price: Support HB 657, An Act Relative to Municipal Assistance for Clean Water and Economic Development Infrastructure (Rep. Carolyn Dykema and co-sponsors)

ISSUE

The Commonwealth and its municipalities face an impending water crisis created by antiquated infrastructure and a failure to properly invest in maintaining existing water and sewer infrastructure.

BACKGROUND:

Across the nation, cities and towns depend on water infrastructure to provide clean and reliable water for the protection of public health and safety while enhancing economic viability and overall quality of life. The million miles of water pipes below our streets represent an enormous public asset largely built and paid for by earlier generations. Aging and failing water and sewer infrastructure threatens public health and safety by degrading water quality and compromising fire protection through reduced flow.

Many Massachusetts communities have water and sewer systems that are well over 100 years old and are in dire need of rehabilitation and/or replacement. Leaking water pipes drive up treatment costs and increase the risk of breaks. Leaking sewer pipes allow groundwater infiltration, driving up wastewater treatment costs and negatively impacting groundwater levels. Many water/wastewater treatment plants were built in the 1970s (with federal funding) and now require significant upgrades that will cost millions. In addition, the US EPA Phase II Stormwater program requires many communities to develop plans to treat stormwater discharges, costing millions of dollars statewide. Safe and reliable drinking water and clean water bodies sustain our ecosystems, economy and recreational opportunities, and provide a quality of life that Massachusetts residents have come to expect.

There is an increasing awareness that many Massachusetts communities have grossly undervalued their water systems and as a result, have failed to re-invest in them at levels required to sustain them. The collective economic impact is daunting. The Commonwealth needs to provide leadership and direction to ensure solutions are created to help communities and their respective water suppliers deal with this significant funding gap.

KEY POINTS

- ◆ Much of the water infrastructure below our streets was constructed during three periods: the late 1800s, the Roaring 1920s and during the post-World War II baby boom. The pipes from these different eras are wearing out now and will continue to wear out over the next three decades.
- ◆ The Massachusetts Water Infrastructure Finance Commission found that there is a significant gap between available funding and what is needed over the next 20 years to improve water-related infrastructure: \$10.2 billion for drinking water; \$11.2 billion for wastewater; conservative estimate of \$18 billion for stormwater.
- ◆ A report issued at the US Conference of Mayors (2008) states that every dollar invested in water infrastructure services returns \$8.97 to the national economy.
- ◆ 28,500 jobs are created for every \$1 billion spent on water infrastructure investment. (US Conference of Mayors, others).

ACTIONS REQUESTED

- ◆ *We respectfully ask the legislature to support increased funding for water infrastructure, including H. 657- An Act providing for the establishment of sustainable water resource funds*
- ◆ *Chapter 259 of the Acts of 2014 raised the state capitalization of the SRF program from \$88 million to \$138 million, but the legislature needs to appropriate the funding. The Act also provides access to less than 2% loans, 0% or even principal forgiveness if a project meets certain criteria: Encourage DEP to move quickly to develop regulations to specify the criteria so that these subsidies will be available to eligible projects as intended under the law.*