



MAYOR BRETT P. SMILEY  
CITY OF PROVIDENCE

# STORMWATER AND SEWER TASK FORCE RECOMMENDATIONS

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Priscilla De La Cruz  
Director of Sustainability

December 11, 2025





**In the past two years, the city has experienced 13 flash flooding events.**



**Pleasant Valley Pkwy**



**Atwells Ave**

**Problems come from inadequate maintenance, aging and deteriorated infrastructure, and more frequent and extreme precipitation.**



Angell St



Eagle Square



Kingsley Ave



**Water pushes out of  
a manhole on Branch Ave**

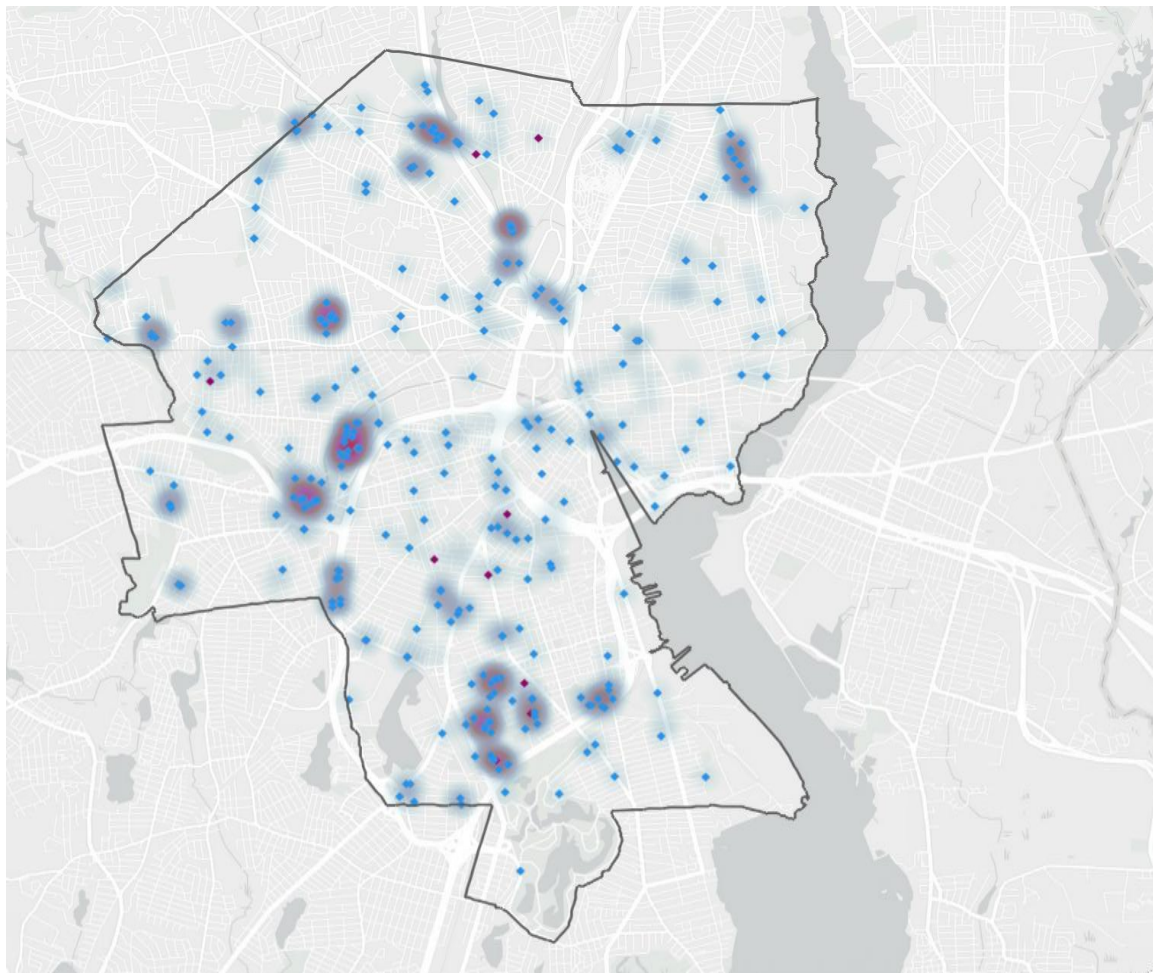


Commercial Plaza on Branch Ave



1-95 near Thurbers Ave

# Flooding across Providence



## Legend

Flooding events due to known sewer backups and unidentified infrastructure failure between August 2022 and May 2024.

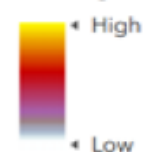
City of Providence Boundary



Flood Events

- Flooding (Building + Street)
- Sewer Backup

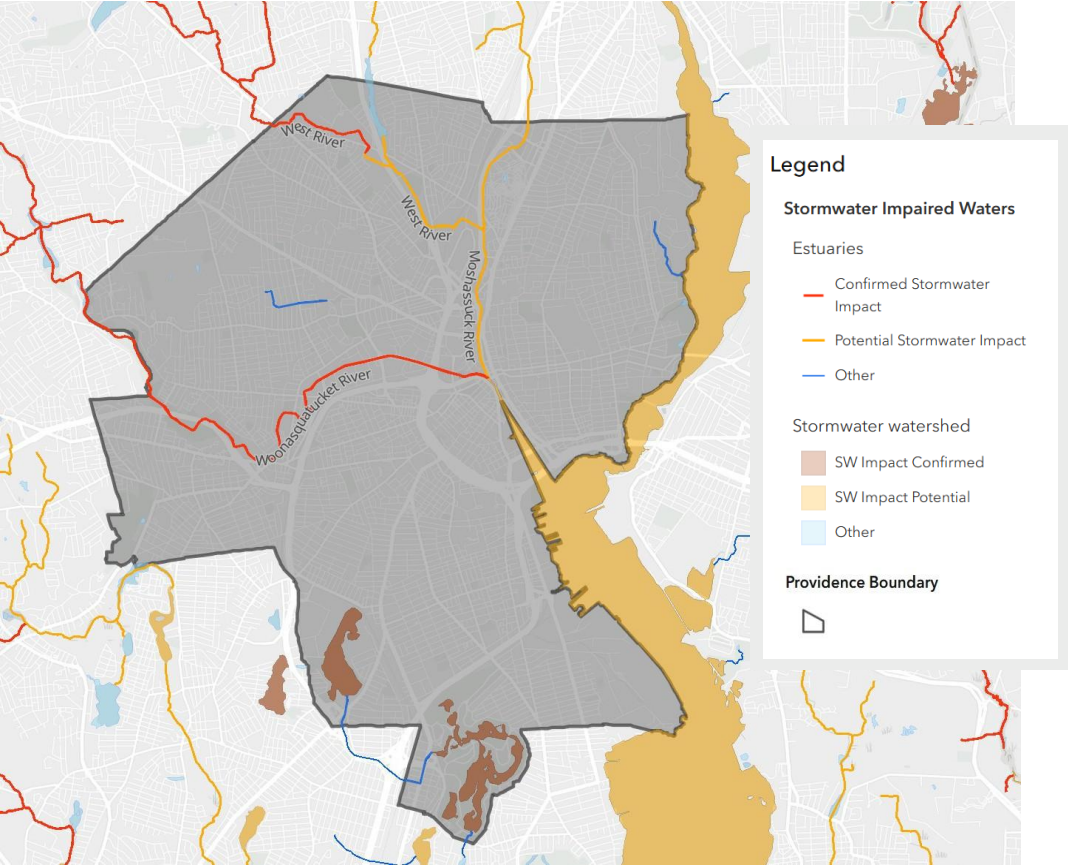
Flooding Hotspots





**Stormwater run-off carries pollution to a storm drain and is released to a body of water without being treated.**

# Providence Waterway Stormwater Run-off Pollution



Official State of Rhode Island website

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND  
Department of Environmental Management

Home » [Press Releases](#) »  
RIDOH and DEM Recommend Avoiding Contact with All Roger Williams Park Ponds

**RIDOH and DEM Recommend Avoiding Contact with All Roger Williams Park Ponds**

Published on Tuesday, July 30, 2024

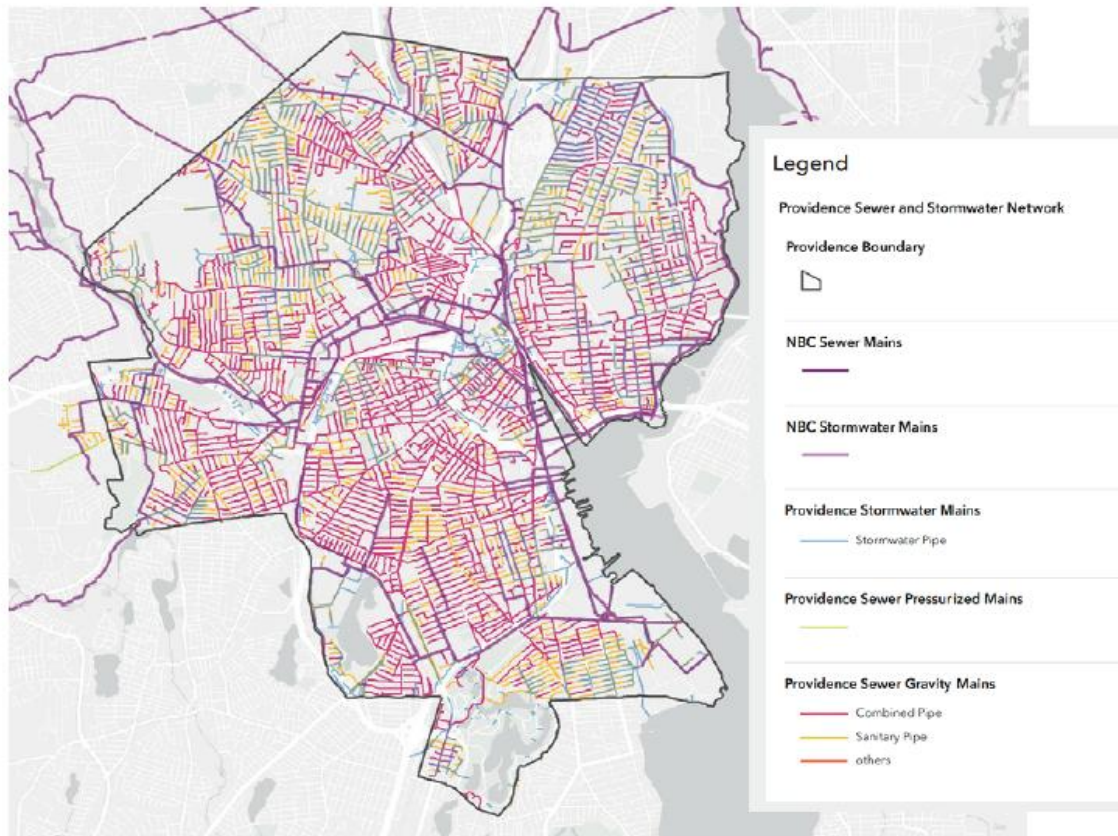
RIDEM, University of Rhode Island, Esri, Tom Tom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS

**City of Providence's  
wastewater and stormwater  
infrastructure are subject to  
Clean Water Act requirements.**



# Sewer Infrastructure in Providence

## City of Providence & Narragansett Bay Commission Storm & Sewer Networks



University of Rhode Island, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph, GeoTechnologies, Inc, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS, USDA, USFWS

## TYPES OF SYSTEMS

- Separate sanitary system
- Municipal separate storm sewer system
- Combined sewer system

Providence doesn't have a dedicated revenue stream to manage its stormwater and sewer infrastructure

## CITY-OWNED

- 451 MILES OF PIPES
- 19,202 MANHOLES
- 13,858 CATCH BASINS

# Stormwater and Sewer Task Force

## Objectives

1. Help address critical stormwater and sewer infrastructure needs and solutions
2. Establish the Stormwater and Sewer Task Force, representing a wide range of interests
3. Review the City's current costs and management approach, and 10-year cost projections
4. Evaluate financing options
5. Make recommendations to the City



# Challenges to Address

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**Environmental Justice**

**Regulatory compliance**

**Increased localized  
flooding**

**Chronic underfunding**

# Stakeholder Task Force: Membership

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Councilor Sue AnderBois

City Council

Councilor Helen Anthony

City Council

April Brown

Formerly with REJC

Siobhan Callahan

West Broadway Neighborhood Assoc.

Leandro (Kufa) Castro

Building Futures

Al Dahlberg

Brown University

Anthony DeMatteo

Dimeo Construction

Carla DeStefano

SWAP, Inc.

Michael DiBiase

RIPEC

Topher Hamblett

Save The Bay

Michele Jalbert

Providence Resilience Partnership

John Kelly

Meeting Street

Alicia Lehrer

WRWC

Cris Llopoz Osorio

Providence Human Relations  
Commission member

Adam Lupino

LiUNA!

Jonesy Mann

AS220

Alex Miller

Cornish Associates

Amelia Rose

Groundwork RI

Anusha Venkataraman

One Neighborhood  
Builders

Chandelle Wilson

Southside Community Land  
Trust)

Seth Zeren

Armory Revival



# Task Force: TA + City Staff

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## Technical Assistance

Laura Collins  
New England Environmental  
Finance Center

Elizabeth Scott  
SNEP Network Liaison for Rhode  
Island

Martha Sheils  
Director, NE Environmental  
Finance Center

Jen West  
Coastal Training Program  
Coordinator, Narragansett Bay  
Research Reserve

Anna Patterson  
Project Director, UNC  
Environmental Finance Center

## City Staff

Brian Byrnes  
Deputy Superintendent of Providence Parks  
Priscilla De La Cruz  
Director of Department of Sustainability  
Clara DeCerbo  
Director of PEMA  
Sheila Dormody  
Chief of Policy and Resiliency  
Craig Hochman  
Chief Engineer, Department of Public Works  
Matt Shumate  
Deputy Chief of Staff  
Alexis Thompson  
Zoning Official, Inspection and Standards  
Sophie Worsh-Farnum  
Sustainability Policy Associate

# Task Force Process

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2024 Meetings	Topics
May	Stormwater 101, understanding infrastructure in Providence, equity in sustainability
Early June	How Dirty Water is Managed, Regulatory requirements
Late June	Assessment of current costs and funding options
July – August	Task Force community outreach and engagement



# Testimonials

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“My apartment used to fill up with water, every time it rained I would wake up with a towel to collect the water... I became afraid of the rain and the river”

"I had [...] days that my salon flooded. Customers could not drive to my location because the police would block off the street and the water in the streets was so high. I would lose at least 20 customers each day that happened... Our basement would get flooded every time but the worst thing was losing all that business"



# Task Force Process Cont'd

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September	Funding and financing options, case study with equitable framework, outreach insights
October	Understanding sustainable, feasible funding options and review consultant Raftelis analysis
November	Develop criteria to evaluate options and recommendations to the City of Providence
December	Review 10-year cost projections, apply criteria and evaluate funding options, and make recommendations



# Task Force Recommendations

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## Stormwater User Fee

Education & outreach

Transparency & accountability

Alignment with other City plans

Job training opportunity



## Sewer User Fee

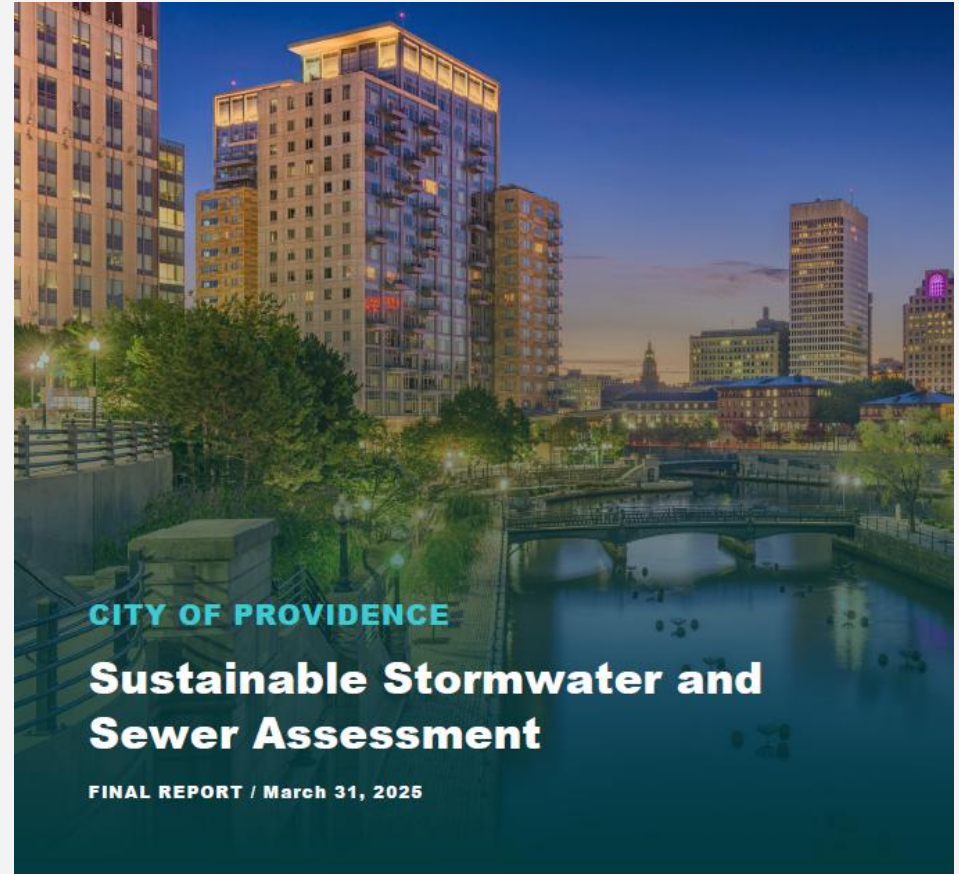
Equity

Driving behavioral change



# In the Report

1. Inventory City-owned infrastructure and problems resulting from lack of investment
2. Likelihood of meeting needs using current approach (tax revenues) vs. dedicated, user fee-based funding
3. City-specific analysis of projected costs for stormwater and sewer programs
4. Estimated rates under user fee approach
5. Task force recommendations



# Sewer & Storm Current Costs

	FY 2025
<u>Operations &amp; Maintenance</u>	
Department of Public Works:	
Sewer Construction	\$ 1,558,247
Engineering	\$ 846,410
Public Works Admin	\$ 155,824
Traffic	\$ 5,000
Garage	\$ 410,775
Highway	\$ 810,314
Snow Removal (storm response)	\$ -
Parks Dept (GSI maintenance)	\$ 115,000
O&M	\$ 3,901,570
<u>Capital</u>	
Capital Projects	\$ 8,436,145
Flood Mitigation Projects	\$ -
Capital	\$ 8,436,145
<b>Sewer/Storm Total</b>	<b>\$ 12,337,715</b>

No funding for  
Flood Mitigation  
Projects

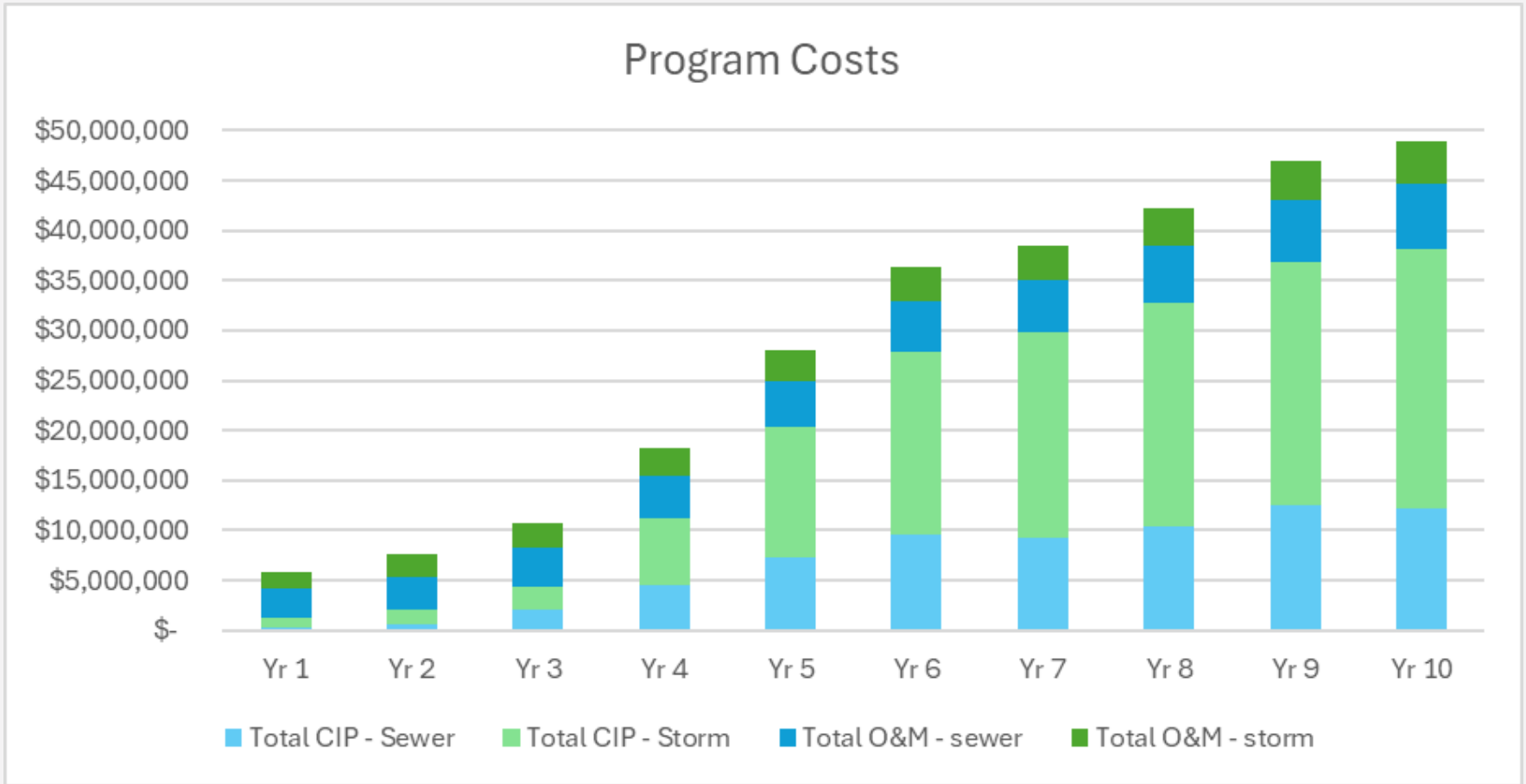


# Unmet Needs

- 60% of the system is estimated to be over 100 years old, beyond expected useful life and anticipated to need renewal and replacement.
- Without a long-term capital planning outlook, DPW cannot justify additional staff positions to reach measurable goals.



# Future Costs – Program Goals



# Stormwater and Sewer Funding Sources

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## General Fund

Primary source City currently uses to pay for stormwater and sewer management



## Grants, Loans and Bonds

Secondary source City currently uses or may use in the future, to pay for stormwater and sewer management

## Stormwater and Sewer Fees

An option to replace or supplement existing funding and financing that relates user demand to amount charged



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# Constraints of Tax Approach

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- Overall City tax increases are capped annually.
- Annual funding may not be guaranteed, especially as programs grow and become a bigger proportion of total tax levy.
- **Lacks fairness:** Tax-exempt properties would not be contributing to covering increased sewer and stormwater costs.



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# What can fees help pay for?

## Capital Improvements

- Major Infrastructure projects
- Infrastructure upgrades

## Operations and Maintenance

- Infrastructure repairs
- Inspections
- Cleaning
- Debris removal
- Emergency and flood response and repair

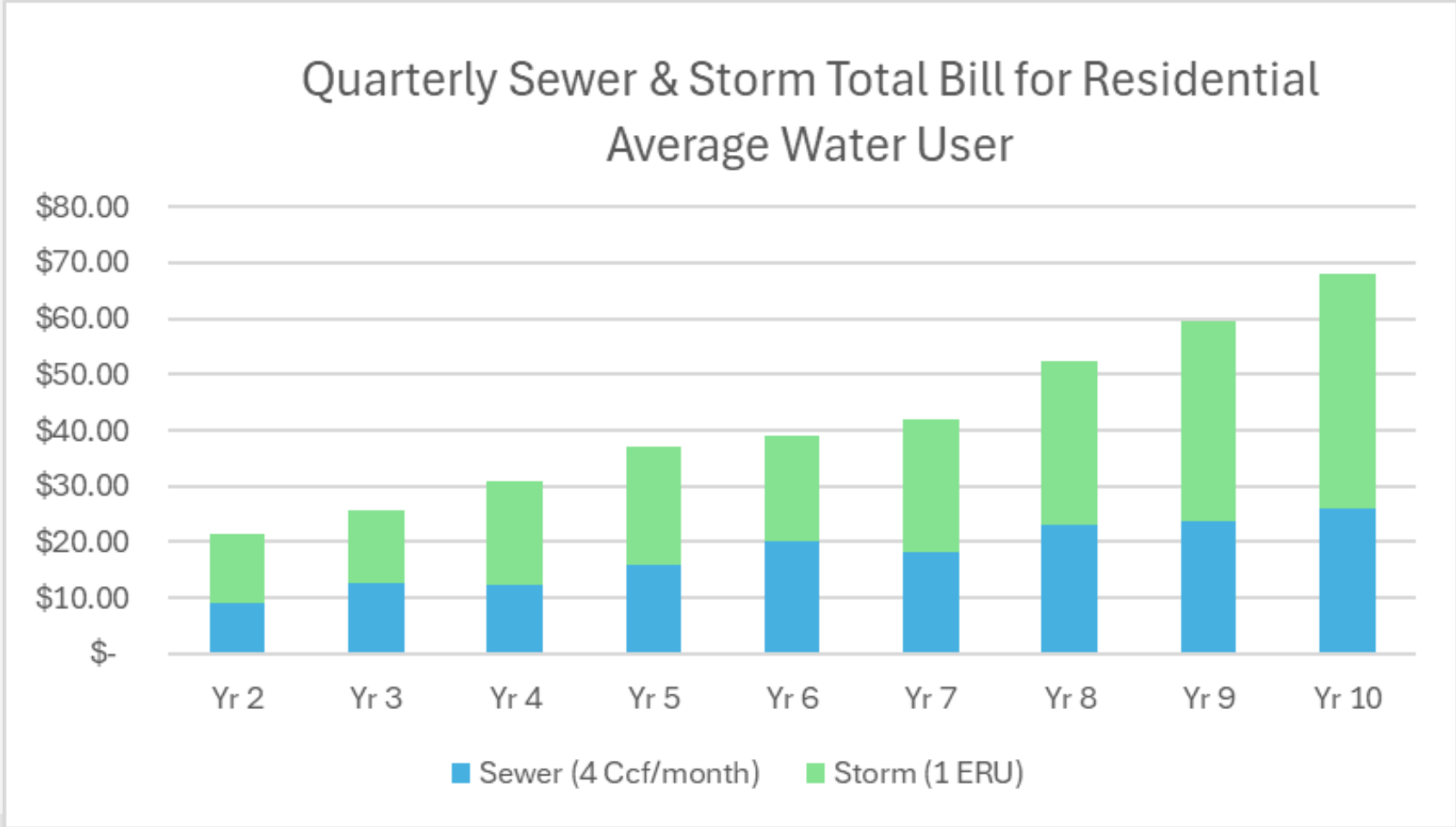
## Regulatory Costs

- RIPDES MS4 Permit
- Consent Order Compliance
- TMDL Implementation
- Separate Sewer Overflow prevention

## Administrative Costs

- Staff Salaries
- Permitting and Plan review
- Contractors
- Consultants
- Policy development
- Emergency preparedness
- Supplies
- Equipment
- Education and outreach
- Incentives or rebates

# Projected Sewer & Stormwater User Fees



# Tax vs. Fee Approach

## Tax approach:

- Sewer and stormwater programs will likely continue to be underfunded; City goals are unlikely to be achieved.
- This is the status quo.

## Fee approach:

- Move beyond status quo through:
  - Dedicated funding to hire staff
  - Ability to plan capital program beyond 1–3-year horizon
  - Ability to issue revenue-backed bonds to finance necessary infrastructure improvements
  - Equity in having the tax-exempt properties contribute to funding these improvements
- Customer impacts from the combined storm + sewer fees are a fraction of the current NBC fee, which is also likely to increase over time.
- Customers can lower their fees through credits and envisioned Customer Assistance Program.

# Task Force Consensus

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- Increase and sustain investments to our City's aging infrastructure
- Invest in more Green infrastructure
  - Infiltration basins
  - Sand filters
  - Rain gardens
  - Runoff systems (bioswale)
  - Decrease in impervious areas
- Pre-implement dedicated user fees for stormwater and sewer management – only viable option



# What's Next

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- Work together on deeper analysis, pre-implementation framework, and robust engagement and outreach to gather input and shape program.
- **GOOD NEWS:** We secured funding for phase two!
  - SNEP Watershed Implementation Grants (SWIG) grant 2025 - 2027
  - Continue contracting with Raftelis for additional analyses and information gathering 2026
  - Develop program administrative framework and pre-implementation roadmap 2026 - 2027
  - Fund resources for engagement and outreach 2026
- Together, implement Task Force recommendations to enable City's ability to establish dedicated user fees for stormwater and sewer management.

# DISCUSSION

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