



Communities in Action: Stormwater Spotlight

GET THE NEWS!

Keys to Success in Ashland:

- Connect with your stakeholders.
- Integrate your town's unique needs with the design of your proposal.
- Weave your campaign message into your town's story.
- Build a critical mass of supporters.
- Become an "irresistible force." Someone must champion this process. It may as well be you!
- Be trustworthy. Do your homework and don't overpromise.
- Sell benefits that are believable. Stakeholders must come to believe in the benefits.
- Prepare a proposed budget. Numbers make the problem real to stakeholders.
- Collaborate with your key stakeholders from the beginning of the design process.
- Reach out to other towns that have had successes and learn from them.
- Thoroughly educate all ages of your public over time. Be patient. You must go slow to go fast.
- Find new elements that make it possible for residents to accept proposed solutions.

This is a special edition of Stormwater News profiling work that Massachusetts communities are doing related to financing, outfall mapping, and creative approaches to support water quality and reduce nutrient pollution.

Municipal Stormwater Funding Solutions in Ashland, MA

Funding municipal stormwater programs isn't easy, but some towns have found an innovative way.

Ashland's path to stable stormwater funding was more about the town's future quality of life than the current budget crunch. According to Maeghan Dos Anjos (Ashland's Conservation Agent and Director), "We succeeded in educating the public about their valuable water resources right here in Ashland, about watersheds and the damage that contaminated stormwater can do. Turns out that this information stuck with them long-term and helped give us ongoing support even after adoption."

So how did Ashland turn a funding problem into an opportunity? What steps did town officials take that ended up with unanimous approval for a fee-based stormwater funding mechanism? How did that three-year journey start, and why did it succeed?

Ashland operates a small municipal separate stormwater system (MS4) and is located about halfway between Boston and Worcester. The town offers residents boating, fishing, and swimming opportunities, but many local ponds, rivers, and lakes have been damaged by surface water pollution including stormwater runoff. The town's section of the Sudbury River does not meet the state's "fishable and swimmable" water quality standards because the river is overloaded with nutrients, resulting in algae and weeds. The town's Waushakum Pond and Ashland Reservoir are similarly impaired, restricting public recreation.

REMINDER:

Annual Reports are due **September 30, 2019**

Email them to stormwater.reports@epa.gov and
Frederick.Civian@mass.gov

Most Massachusetts municipalities operating MS4s, including Ashland, fund their stormwater programs through property taxes (e.g. the “general fund”). Robert St. Germain (Chair of the town’s Stormwater Advisory Committee) explained that “Ashland’s budget is largely dependent on residential property taxes with a small commercial sector to tax.” Municipal budgets are often tight, and it is challenging for stormwater program funding to rise to the top, especially if town residents are unaware of stormwater problems and the real costs of implementing a stormwater management program.

Ashland had attempted to address stormwater problems before, starting with forming a Stormwater Advisory Committee (SWAC) to research and identify a funding mechanism that might be acceptable to the town. A consultant study and additional work by the SWAC resulted in several important findings. Ashland’s stormwater program was underfunded, general fund appropriations were unpredictable, and the estimated cost of stormwater permit compliance over five years was about \$2.3 million. The SWAC submitted a report and recommendations to town officials. The town officials accepted these recommendations, which added clarity and urgency to look for additional funding.

Creating a stormwater enterprise fund (a form of stormwater utility) was one potential option. An enterprise fund would require everyone to pay their fair share based on the amount of stormwater runoff that their properties produce. Stormwater utilities can provide a dedicated and consistent stream of funding to maintain, repair, and replace stormwater infrastructure before flooding or overflow events occur, which cause expensive damage or impact public safety. A new fund dedicated to stormwater issues would allow Ashland’s general fund to support other local priorities.



Photos from the EPA-sponsored workshop “Getting Community Buy-in for Stormwater Funding”



While the SWAC and the town’s selectmen reacted to the report with enthusiasm, the town had not yet addressed a critical barrier to adopting any funding mechanism: approval from ratepayers. The SWAC was given six months to build community support. Around this time, Ms. Dos Anjos participated in an EPA Region 1-sponsored workshop series “[Getting Community Buy-in for Stormwater Funding.](#)” The 4-session training addressed the critical role stakeholder involvement plays in the successful adoption of stormwater funding mechanisms. The training was developed by EPA after case study research showed that effective stakeholder engagement often determined the success or failure of a stormwater funding proposal. The workshops trained Ashland and other towns to use basic mediation and facilitation skills, including identifying their town’s key stakeholders, preparing stakeholder maps, conducting interviews to accurately identify concerns and positions, and designing public outreach/information campaigns. Participants learned to reach out to local stakeholders early and often to understand concerns and develop a customized outreach and education strategy.

In Ashland, it was critical to stay positive with their outreach messages. Ashland focused on: an opportunity to do what is right including cleaning up the town’s access to the recreational opportunities limited by stormwater pollution, and reversing stormwater’s negative effect on property values and quality of life.

Mr. St. Germain characterized their outreach training as “Marketing 101 - as we were educating our stakeholders, we were learning as well. We used whatever venues we could: farmer’s markets, posters, and flyers. We wrote news articles, engaged people in conversations and held televised appearances with the board of selectmen. We also used the [Enviroscape model](#), which educated people on stormwater threats and made presentations at school events.”

Massachusetts Statewide Education Program

Think Blue Massachusetts is a statewide educational campaign run by the Massachusetts Statewide Municipal Stormwater Coalition to help residents and businesses do their part to reduce polluted runoff and keep Massachusetts lakes, rivers, and streams clean and healthy.

Learn more at www.thinkbluemassachusetts.org



The model provides a hands-on, interactive demonstration of the sources and effects of water pollution, including polluted stormwater runoff, and ways to prevent it. The SWAC also incorporated elements of the “[Think Blue Massachusetts](#)” campaign into their work. Think Blue Massachusetts, also known as the “Rubber Ducky campaign,” is a statewide campaign that increases awareness about the harmful effects of stormwater pollution on the state’s waterways.

Ashland’s stakeholder interviews also revealed what kind of ratepaying approaches were more acceptable. Engaging students at schools became a way to connect with parents. Mr. St. Germain and Ms. Dos Anjos recruited new SWAC members from Reading with experience adopting a stormwater funding utility. SWAC members also appeared on the town’s public access TV channel and answered questions. This was especially important because most Ashland citizens didn’t come to live events, but followed town news on the open access channel.

Over time, Ashland’s stakeholder involvement and outreach campaign efforts made a difference and started to build community support for an enterprise fund. At town meeting, dozens of “Think Blue” rubber duckies were visible in the room and presenters highlighted the connection between reducing pollution and improving water-based recreational opportunities. A short question-and-answer session was followed by unanimous approval of the proposal.

Maeghan Dos Anjos stressed that asking the right people for help at the right time is important. “Assistance can come from multiple sources including consultants, municipal stormwater coalitions, and from municipalities that have already adopted stormwater funding mechanisms. Reach out to local resources including your conservation commission, Department of Public Works and Boards of Health. MassDEP and EPA are useful sources of information and provide training.”

Ms. Dos Anjos summed up Ashland’s experience: “Success won’t necessarily be easy, it’s a political process after all. But implementing these strategies will make success much more likely. It will take time and a team to accomplish this. You need collaboration. You need a team.”

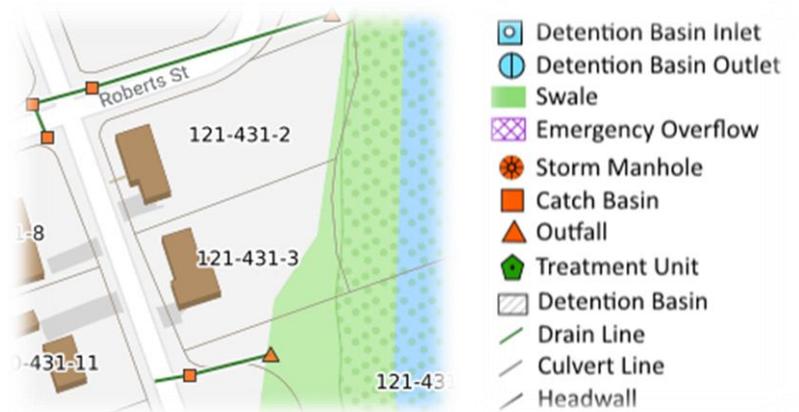
Lots of factors helped Ashland succeed. Ms. Dos Anjos said, “We succeeded in educating the public about their valuable water resources right here in Ashland, about watersheds and the damage that contaminated stormwater can do. Turns out that this information stuck with them long-term and helped give us ongoing support even after adoption. We worked hard to build consensus by collaborating with stakeholders in our entire community, including our own staff. You already know the stakeholders that support you as well as the stakeholders that oppose you. Focus on the stakeholders on the fence.”

Ashland’s successful campaign proves that shifting the conversation from “We’ve got a problem” to “We have an opportunity” can lead to real results.

Chelmsford's Inexpensive Method to Map Stormwater Outfalls

Originally a farming community founded in 1655, the town of Chelmsford has undergone significant expansion. Extensive development requires increased need for infrastructure; drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater. Today, the town has 4,500 storm drains, 800 drain manholes, 95 miles of drain pipe, 240 culverts and 650 outfalls. Keeping track of all this infrastructure is challenging. One way that the town is helping maintain their infrastructure is by utilizing a Geographic Information System (GIS). The GIS captures data throughout their system in an accurate manner and is essential to ensure that their maps are up-to-date and precise. GIS helps the town plan and track their maintenance activities, identify any issues with the condition of their assets, and meet EPA stormwater permit requirements.

Mapping that many assets did not happen overnight. Chelmsford wanted to get a jump start on ensuring that their maps were accurate within 30 feet (a requirement for the 2016 MA MS4 permit) so the town borrowed a Global Positioning System (GPS) unit from EPA Region 1 and hired an intern to collect outfall data and update their maps. During this field campaign, the town found many more outfalls than expected. By using the GPS equipment loan program and the summer intern, Chelmsford was able to cost-effectively map their outfalls in a GIS system. This approach helped to keep costs of mapping their infrastructure down, while also allowing the town's municipal staff to focus on other duties.



GPS Equipment Loan & On-site Training Program

EPA has a limited number of Global Positioning System (GPS) units available to loan, **at no cost**, for stormwater mapping. On-site training on the use of the GPS equipment is included. For more information, contact Deborah Cohen at cohen.deborah@epa.gov.

Arlington and Winchester in Action

Arlington and Winchester are working with an EPA-funded interdisciplinary project team to identify water resource challenges and steps towards solutions. These motivated municipalities are developing strategic approaches and identifying remaining local and regional needs to advance water quality restoration efforts and reduce nutrient pollution in the watershed. The first two tasks selected by the towns were completed in Summer 2019:

- Evaluate local stormwater bylaws and regulations to align with water quality progress; and
- Develop “cut sheets” that detail simple, small-scale structural Best Management Practices (BMPs) that can be easily built and maintained by Department of Public Works staff.

The second task – plans for simple, inexpensive, small-scale stormwater controls (also known as BMPs) - demonstrates how practical and easily-maintained stormwater controls can be integrated into the towns' regular street, sidewalk work, and capital improvement projects. These small-scale stormwater controls not only can increase the capacity of the stormwater system but also contribute to significant reductions of nutrients and other pollutants into impaired surface waters. Pollutant load reduction credits from these stormwater controls, calculated in accordance with the 2016 small MS4 permit, will count toward meeting the towns' Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) pollution reduction requirements of the MS4 permit.

Participants include Department of Public Works, Planning and Conservation Commission staff from Winchester and Arlington, the University of New Hampshire's Stormwater Center, the Consensus Building Institute, ERG, EPA Region 1, and MassDEP.

Stormwater Financing Toolkit

Getting Community Buy-in for Stormwater Funding: A Four Session Participatory Workshop: Facilitator Manual
https://cfpub.epa.gov/si/si_public_record_report.cfm?Lab=NHEERL&dirEntryId=346132

The Potential Advantages of a Stormwater Utility for Financing Your Stormwater Management Needs
<https://www.hrg-inc.com/the-potential-advantages-of-a-stormwater-utility-for-financing-your-stormwater-management-needs/>

Watershed/Nonpoint Source Model
<https://www.enviroscares.com/product/watershed-nonpoint-source-model/hands-on-models>

Think Blue Massachusetts Launches Stormwater Educational Campaign
<https://www.mma.org/think-blue-massachusetts-launches-stormwater-education-campaign/>

Additional Assistance Resources from EPA and MassDEP

Stormwater Tools in New England Website

Find the latest tools, resources, and updates on upcoming training opportunities.

<https://www.epa.gov/npdes-permits/stormwater-tools-new-england>

Public Education and Outreach Program

The MS4 Permit requires each town to implement a public education and outreach program that reaches four different audiences and that includes messages that are most relevant to that community. Town officials can click on MassDEP's link below to download – and save – brochures, pamphlets and other materials and use those to help comply with Section 2.3.2.c of the MS4 permit: <https://go.usa.gov/x5dgr>

For “hands on” MS4 training and assistance for your community, call MassDEP's Stormwater Coordinators, Fred Civian at 617-292-5821 or Laura Schifman at 617-556-1157.

Massachusetts Stormwater News is a collaborative effort of the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) and the New England office of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA). This newsletter will be sent via email every few months to provide information to municipalities and others related to the Massachusetts Small Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) permit. MA Stormwater News will feature topics of interest, provide updates on upcoming permit deadlines, and highlight assistance resources from MassDEP, U.S. EPA and others.

U.S. EPA and MassDEP know that stormwater management is just one of the many challenges facing municipalities. We are committed to working with municipalities as you move forward on permit implementation.

Submission of Annual Reports is a requirement of the MS4 permit. Failure to submit Annual Reports may subject the permittee to possible enforcement action. Communities that do not submit Annual Reports are missing an important opportunity to bring focus to the stormwater program, its associated requirements, and budget implications for the community.

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