Future Savings
Matawan Borough’s smart investments in infrastructure

Trio of Towns’ Public Safety Center

Forclosure Mediation Assistance Program

Focus: Infrastructure
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Building a Better Garden State

According to a recent White House statement, “the United States of America is the wealthiest country in the world, yet we rank 13th when it comes to the overall quality of our infrastructure.” With the administration’s commitment to infrastructure, hope is resurfacing for the Gateway Program. And on the local level, municipal officials are working creatively on their infrastructure plans with an eye to a successful future.

In this issue, NJ Future shares some insights on the potential benefits of adding a stormwater utility to your municipality (page 6). One factor is fairness to taxpayers, always a consideration for local governments. “…A stormwater utility is equitable,” the article notes. “It ensures that property owners pay their fair share based on the amount of stormwater that they generate. When stormwater management is paid through property taxes or other mechanisms, tax-exempt entities such as hospitals, universities and property owners who do not receive water/sewer bills (large parking lots) pay nothing, placing a higher burden on other property owners.”

We also share the success story of Matawan as it upgrades its roads, curbs, and sidewalks while simultaneously refurbishes its inlets and maintains access to the storm drain system. This all-in-one process illustrates smart project planning and funding.

But infrastructure isn’t just pipe in the ground. More than ever, New Jersey’s residents and governments are relying on consistent and secure internet access to keep things going during the pandemic. Life has profoundly changed as a result of these times, and the internet will continue to be a major avenue to the continuing recovery process.

In a demonstration of its continued commitment to the State of New Jersey and its local governments, longtime NJ League of Municipalities Education Foundation supporter Walmart has provided a grant of $100,000 to the foundation to help address educational connectivity issues (see page 60). NJLMEF has announced the first round of grants awarded to 10 selected schools and local governments, bringing these two vital divisions of government together in the hope of forming a more powerful solution to this widespread issue.

We’re proud to be a part of helping municipalities build the infrastructure that will help them and their residents succeed into the future.

Finally, we are proud continue to help our members through educational opportunities. We will continue to offer Legislative Briefings on hot topics.

P.S. Please join us next month at the Online Mini Conference. Visit www.njim.org/miniconference for more information.
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Rest Easier When It Rains
A stormwater utility could provide the cost-effective sigh of relief your community needs

BRIANNE CALLAHAN, Stormwater Manager, NJ Future

Does your community suffer from the negative effects of flooding, pollution, and property damage? Are you trapped in a cycle of spending emergency funds to repair aging and inadequate infrastructure? Are you weighed down by the pressure to fund new regulatory requirements?
You are not alone.
New Jersey communities have a growing problem. We are experiencing stronger storms and greater rainfall than ever before. Citing over 50 years of data, the National Climate Assessment observed a 71% increase in the amount of precipitation falling in very heavy storm events in the northeastern United States. This is the greatest increase across the country. Echoing these findings, in 2018, New Jersey experienced its highest amount of rainfall on record. Coupled with increased development, heavy rainfall creates additional stormwater runoff that leads to more frequent flash flooding, street closings, property damage, infrastructure failure, and sewer overflows.

Over 1,800 communities, across 40 different states in the US, have turned to stormwater utilities as a solution. Now, New Jersey communities can, too! In March 2019, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy signed into law the Clean Stormwater and Flood Reduction Act, which gives local government entities the ability to establish stormwater utilities if they so choose.

Perhaps most importantly, a stormwater utility incentivizes property owners (both residential and commercial) to reduce runoff from their properties.

So what is a stormwater utility? Similar to a water or sewer utility, a stormwater utility is a dedicated funding mechanism specifically enacted to address stormwater management problems. If established, stormwater utilities collect fees based on the amount of stormwater a property generates. Municipalities, counties, groups of municipalities, and sewerage and improvement authorities can establish stormwater utilities. Fee revenue is dedicated solely to stormwater management, ensuring that the negative impacts of stormwater can be addressed.

Why Stormwater Utilities Make Municipal Good Sense

There are many reasons why stormwater utilities have proven to be a reliable, effective, and long-term solution to stormwater pollution and flooding.

First, a stormwater utility is equitable. It ensures that property owners pay their fair share based on the amount of stormwater that they generate. When stormwater management is paid through property taxes or other mechanisms, tax-exempt entities such as hospitals, universities and property owners who do not receive water/sewer bills (large
parking lots) pay nothing, placing a higher burden on other property owners. In Harrisburg, PA, city officials calculated that stormwater management based on sewer rates would cost residential customers $2.54 million per year, while calculating the fee based on impervious area with a stormwater utility saved residential customers $1.3 million. That’s an amazing cost savings!

A stormwater utility is also dedicated and stable. As mentioned above, by law the fee revenue must be spent on stormwater needs and cannot be shifted to pay for other expenditures.

Revenue is generated continually, usually in monthly or quarterly billings. This enables localities to proactively plan and budget for projects, avoiding costly emergency repairs that normally occur when system maintenance is deferred. Also, New Jersey has a statutory budget cap which limits municipal increases to 2% per year for operational spending. With a stormwater utility, operations and maintenance costs, such as street sweeping services, would no longer be included in the 2% cap. This frees up monies for other general fund needs like emergency services and education.

Flexibility is another key benefit of a stormwater utility. The fee can be adjusted over time if the community changes its desired service level, and there are many options to structure and finance the utility, which can be crafted to meet a locality’s individual needs. These options could include utilizing public private partnerships, regional utility structure, and addressing utility affordability.

A stormwater utility also boosts local economic growth. Businesses benefit from the beauty and utility of green infrastructure projects, jobs are created, and property values increase.

Conversely, failing infrastructure can easily impede a locality’s potential and vision for the future.

Perhaps most importantly, a stormwater utility incentivizes property owners (both residential and commercial) to reduce runoff from their properties. Property owners can implement stormwater control measures to obtain credits that reduce their total stormwater fee. Control measures can include downspout disconnection, cisterns, rain gardens or bioretention, porous pavement, and much more.

Nearby states, such as Pennsylvania and Delaware have experienced the positive impacts of employing a stormwater utility firsthand. Wilmington, DE, Department of Public Works Commissioner Kelly Williams attributes vast improvements to establishing a stormwater utility: “By establishing a stormwater utility, Wilmington was able to directly address its stormwater issues while equitably distributing the cost of compliance and watershed protection. Without the utility, we would be struggling to give stormwater the priority it deserves.” Creating a utility can ensure a stronger, healthier, and safer community that rests easier when it rains.

Establish a Stormwater Utility

Communities across New Jersey are working on implementing this effective tool. Andy Kricun, former executive director of Camden County Municipal Utilities Authority points out that “for combined sewer overflow (CSO)
communities in particular, it is really essential, and only fair, to charge a stormwater fee in order to recoup the costs associated with pumping and treating stormwater. When you mix one gallon of stormwater with one gallon of sewage in a combined sewer system, you have two gallons of sewage that have to be pumped and treated in just the same way, and at the same cost as normal sewage. So, owners of large impervious surfaces, like parking lots, really should pay their fair share of the combined sewage generated from their properties during rain events.”

Stormwater fees are also a good idea for communities with separate sewer systems since the stormwater inlets and piping need to be maintained and periodically replaced. Imagine if your community could proactively plan ahead to build much needed infrastructure and tackle environmental problems in a cost-effective manner, while creating a stable source of income for the work. There are so many benefits—stormwater infrastructure projects can support the local workforce and improve the property values of neighborhoods too. As Kricun puts it, “charging stormwater fees, and then dedicating those fees to the stormwater systems, ensures that they will be taken care of properly in order to protect the community from flooding during wet weather events.” Don’t miss out on an opportunity to better your community.

For More Information

- To get started, visit New Jersey Future’s New Jersey Stormwater Utilities Resource Center (https://stormwaterutilities.njfuture.org) for technical legal and financial information, case studies, and helpful guidance on stormwater solutions, community process, and public engagement. Development of the resource center was guided by local engineers, utilities, attorneys, government officials, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection staff, and the Flood Defense Coalition (www.njcvef.org/flood-defense).
- To learn more about the resources New Jersey Future has available, including our Peer Learning Network and our list of pro bono consultants, and to stay informed about developments in stormwater utilities, connect with us Stormwater Utilities (https://stormwaterutilities.njfuture.org/stay-informed).
- For questions about the resource center, or stormwater utilities in general, contact Brianne Callahan at bcallahan@njfuture.org.
- For further information and NJDEP guidance, please check the NJDEP website, www.nj.gov/dep.
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