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# Engineering company recommends Northampton spend up to \$85 million over 20 years to improve wastewater treatment



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**NORTHAMPTON** – An engineering firm hired by the city to assess its wastewater needs has recommended Northampton spend as much as \$85 million to improve the system over the next 20 years.

The recommendations by the consulting engineering company **Kleinfelder**, which has offices in Springfield among other cities, include replacing aging equipment and bringing the Hockanum Road plant up to revised codes. An abbreviated five-year plan would cost \$30 million and be financed through the sewer enterprise fund.

The report comes after another another firm recommended spending \$100 million to replace the city's aging **stormwater** system, parts of which are more than a century old. The Department of Public Works decided on a more conservative approach, replacing dilapidated sections as needed. However, the city did come up with a new utility fee for stormwater control.

In the spring, Mayor **David J. Narkewicz** hosted a public hearing at City Hall to hear from residents who said the additional fee was a burden that could drive them out of Northampton. Narkewicz then froze the water and sewer fees at last year's rates.

The mayor indicated that the city would take a similarly cautious approach to the measures recommended by Kleinfelder, which include replacing old sludge pumps and bringing the wastewater treatment plant up to code. Built in 1978, the facility was last upgraded in 1996, he said.

"We've been trying to figure out what we can afford to do," he said of himself and Finance Director Susan Wright. "There are a lot of different moving parts. We have to make significant investments."

Kleinfelder presented its study to the public at a hearing in September. The upgraded codes, many of which are established by the federal government, are enforced by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection.

Narkewicz said the city might look at different approaches to paying storm- and wastewater costs, such as tiering them according to income.

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"We might try to knock of pieces (of the plan) slowly, over time," he said.

In part because of Hurricane Katrina and the damage it created along the Gulf Coast, the government has been increasing its oversight of storm- and wastewater filtration and disposal. The upgraded regulations are mandatory.

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