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# Northampton DPW: Old equipment at wastewater treatment plant must be replaced at \$31 million cost or city will face fines



Northampton's wastewater treatment plant on Hockanum Road. (Mary Serreze)



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on October 02, 2015 at 1:04 PM

**NORTHAMPTON** -- A four-year study of the Northampton's wastewater treatment facility has yielded results that could cost the city some major cash, according to officials.

Equipment installed in the facility during its first major expansion in 1978 is rapidly aging, Department of Public Works Director Edward S. Huntley said. And if it's not replaced relatively soon, it could fail in a way that causes untreated water to be discharged into the Connecticut river.

"Equipment fails, like a car, so you replace it on a periodic basis," Huntley said.

The city could face fines if it does not meet discharge permit testings, he explained, which gauge if any untreated wastewater is flowing into the river. Water samplings are reported to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and the state Department of Environmental Protection.

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The DPW's five-year capital improvement plans, presented this week, calls for \$30 million in infrastructure improvements, which would mostly be funneled into the plant, Huntley said.

The study was funded by the city and assessed the wastewater collection system's needs. Beyond replacing old equipment, it also explored whether the city must expand its pipe system and if there has been a degradation in Northampton's water quality.

"Nothing in those areas was flagged as an immediate concern," Huntley said.

About \$85 million should be invested in the city's wastewater collection system over the next 20 years, the DPW's plan asserts. But that number could change, as priorities will be reevaluated every five years over those two decades, Huntley said.

"Overall, the [wastewater treatment plant] is well maintained, meets federal and state permit conditions and is functional," the plan's [executive summary](#) reads.

Any actions related to the proposed project must first be approved by Mayor David J. Narkewicz and the City Council.

Funding would come from the city's Sewer Enterprise Fund that is financed by users of the system. The city is in the process of formulating hypothetical funding models to pay for the project that might minimize taxpayer contribution, and is working with an outside consultant to evaluate more affordable sewer rate structures, according to the DPW.

In the spring, Narkewicz asked the City Council for a 2.88 percent increase in sewer bills, or a total of \$6.2 million that would go into the enterprise fund. The proposed monies were intended for sewer line replacements and repairs. But the approved increase in rates ended up hovering around 2 percent after the city's poor and elderly [pleaded with officials](#) for a break.

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