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Costs of maintaining Northampton's stormwater system laid out



(<http://connect.masslive.com/user/fcontrada/index.html>) By Fred Contrada, The Republican
(<http://connect.masslive.com/user/fcontrada/posts.html>)
on September 27, 2012 at 10:00 PM

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NORTHAMPTON – The city will have to come with another \$1.3 million from its general fund by 2015 to satisfy new federal requirements regarding **stormwater management** (http://www.masslive.com/news/index.ssf/2012/07/northampton_tries_to_guage_the.html) and flood control, according to a presentation Thursday by the joint **City Council** (<http://topics.masslive.com/tag/northampton-city-council/index.html>) and **Board of Public Works Committee** (<http://topics.masslive.com/tag/northampton-board-of-public-works/index.html>).

(http://ads.masslive.com/RealMedia/ads/click_lx.ads/www.masslive.com/news/article/1984792001/StoryAd/MASSLIVE/default/empty.gif/52384161396c4a4f36596b414177367)

In the first of a series of public hearings to address the new mandates and their associated costs, the committee laid out the challenges it faces and solicited input from some 30 people in attendance. Those challenges include a demand by the Army Corps of Engineers that the city correct deficiencies in its dams and levees at an estimated cost of \$2.2 million.

In addition, a new permit from the Environmental Protection Agency, expected to go into effect this fall, will require the city to step up maintenance of its storm drains, distribute information to the public and double its street-sweeping efforts, all of which will require funding.

Board of Public Works chairman Terry Culhane estimated that maintenance costs for the Department of Public Works will rise from the \$400,000 the city spent last year to nearly \$1.7 million in 2015. Although the board has discussed the creation of a Stormwater Enterprise Fund that would cost the average household about \$66 a year, that topic did not come up Thursday. Future hearings will more fully explore budget

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problems, however.

“We’re all in this together,” said City Councilor Paul D. Spector, urging the public to get involved in the conversation. “We’re all trying to find solutions to these problems.”

Department of Public Works Director Edward S. Huntley gave a presentation on the city’s stormwater infrastructure, which comprises 114 miles of pipe and 4,835 catch basins. Under the new federal mandates, those catch basins will have to be cleaned annually, a job that will require more labor and expensive equipment.

The city’s system of dikes keeps 189 acres of downtown Northampton from being flooded when the Connecticut River reaches 127 feet. Should Northampton fail to meet federal mandates, Culhane said, the Federal Emergency Management Agency would redraw the flood zone, forcing people and businesses to buy flood insurance and endangering their mortgages.

Moreover, if the city fails to comply with new standards for its stormwater, the Environmental Protection Agency could find it in violation of the Clean Water Act and fine the city up to %50,000 a day, Culhane said.



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