

Somerville Climate Forward
Infrastructure and Utilities Working Group
May 17, 2018

Attendance

- Jess Fosbrook, City of Somerville
- Zach Lamb
- Seth Berkman
- Rich Raiche, City of Somerville
- Isabel Kaubisch
- Michael Sojka
- Sean Donaghy
- Hannah Payne, City of Somerville

Feedback on draft solutions

- Gas Leak Advocacy
 - Can't address it at the city level so focusing on state regulation is the right approach. However, seemed like the only approach was a 1-to-1 replacement of pipes. Is there anything innovative we can do instead of replacing every pipe?
 - Leak detection with Google—how would this work? Should use any detection/studies to identify biggest leaks for retrofit. This should be made more obvious in the write up.
 - Can monitoring devices be installed on postal trucks, DPW trucks, or trash trucks because they already drive Somerville's streets. How can we use existing public resources?
 - Regional approach is important. Should partner with other cities to push state legislation. Add regional lobbying to solution to make it stronger.
 - Point out avoided costs more clearly—highlight damage from gas leaks and GHG emissions to make benefit of action more clear. Compare GHG savings with pathway results.
 - This solution is identifying gaps utility regulations that municipalities have seen. There is a need to for additional regulation at state level.
 - Is it worth doing a bottom-up study? Is it cost effective? Do we need it if it is already known that there are gas leaks in the system?
 - Any studies should be done for prioritization of action but the onus is on Eversource not on the City to do this study.
 - Maine's approach with gas leaks is interesting – tiered approach is really important because there are diminishing returns on fixing all gas leaks. Should focus on the biggest.
 - Engineering already coordinates with Eversource when they dig up a road, but sees value in more proactive leak detection and more proactive replacement from utility.
 - Boston passed gas leak ordinance and is now being sued because ordinance is illegal under state law (gas companies are regulated at state, not municipal, level).
 - Somerville is considering passing a similar ordinance.
 - There is existing political will to put pressure on state.

Stormwater Enterprise Fund

- Questions: would it apply to only new construction or to all properties? A: all properties.
 - Make sure this is clear in the write up.
- Call it a “stormwater enterprise fund” because Somerville already has water and sewer enterprise. This would be subset of sewer enterprise – because it is already included in sewer enterprise due to combined systems.
- All properties would be subject to it, but at different rates. Need to do study to determine rates.
 - No way to easily assess every property in the city, will likely need to do it by grouping average.
 - Properties would be able to file for abatements. Example abatements could be for replacing driveways and putting in permeable pavers.
- Should add to solution that we have existing enterprise funds and system in place.
- Implementation steps aren’t right—work with Engineering Dept. to revise implementation steps to better fit Somerville’s context.
- Link between rates and existing conditions is critical question.
- Need to make connection to climate change more obvious in solution.
 - People would likely support more if they understand that we have a combined sewer system and with inaction, people could end up with sewage in basement.
 - Climate change connection is stronger in the drainage criteria solution.
 - Need to make it clear that current system can’t handle flows even today.
- Drive home the point that the choice is not between no cost and this—there is already a cost to property owners, this is just a more equitable redistribution of the costs.
 - Make link clear that it isn’t just a new fee but that you can lower the fee by taking proactive steps by doing things that many people would like to do already, like depaving their yard, etc.
 - At the end of the day – these costs will be incurred anyway. Would otherwise be borne by sewer enterprise – in some cases it this will result in a zero sum/ redistribution of cost. Residential would be paying similar or less and large properties with high percentages of impervious surfaces would pay more.
 - Need to do cost accounting and gap analysis of what is currently unfunded.
- Addition of stormwater enterprise fund creates more transparency around what work is being done and splits out stormwater from sewer.
- Highlight benefits of participation even more – not just lower costs—call out green roofs, rain barrels, depaving, etc.
 - Will there be incentives?
- 2/3 of area is private property and the City doesn’t have control over– need to manage stormwater there too—this gets at that problem.
- Don’t put cost estimates in yet—need to complete study first. Focus on more equitable redistribution of costs. Large commercial and non-profit that aren’t paying their share will bear more of the cost than small residential.
- City will have to account for its own properties, but likely won’t pay into the fund. Neither existing enterprise fund charges city buildings.
- Leading by example – City should be leading by example for managing stormwater too.
- Reframing – should be ‘something we are looking into’ – not ‘we are doing this’. Need to do more studies and work to determine how this might work in Somerville.

Drainage Criteria

- Model: Is it possible for the city to own the model at the end of the project?

- Model is very complicated and in order to run it ourselves we would have to modeler on staff, which isn't realistic.
- Make sure model isn't biased toward gray infrastructure. The model that is being built can model green infrastructure interventions.
- How does this effort relate to stormwater enterprise fund?
 - Very closely – this helps us better regulate development. Right now we don't have very clear framework to evaluate development. This helps establish that. Also helps city understand what is plausible for anyone seeking abatement under enterprise fund.
- There are limitations in Somerville: density and really poor soils with high groundwater in some areas. Need to be sensitive to changes to make sure that changes to one lot will not impact their neighbor. Can't require infiltration that will then go into their neighbor's basement or damage neighbor's foundation. Need possibility to pay fee in lieu of infiltration to be able to fund projects elsewhere when site conditions are poor for on-site infiltration.
 - Stormwater cap and trade.
- Add bullet point about bringing the two stormwater solutions together.
- Need to set targets, but also provide examples of how targets can be met (types of interventions). There is some work that is needed to help educate developers on various options.
 - How can we incentivize green choices over gray? Need a flexible model – city could choose which would be applicable based on location – in some cases gray might be only feasible option.
 - In the absence of something that incentivizes green infrastructure developers will choose gray because it is easier.
- Should we include incentives for capturing runoff and using it for non-potable uses?
- Design criteria would apply to all city projects too.
- Good way to frame these solutions– say what the city is already doing to improve stormwater.
 - City should embrace its own design criteria and should be leading by example in all categories.
- Precedents – helpful to have examples of the results from those cities that have established stormwater utilities. Examples of avoided infrastructure costs, example about pollution abatement, etc. would be helpful. Precedents should be success stories. Want to demonstrate that this is not a crazy idea that hasn't been done before.

General Comments on Final Plan

- Audience for the plan includes the general public, decision makers, city staff, and community partners. Should be accessible to a wide audience but include enough detail for those who are interested in implementation steps.
 - In order to be accessible, plan will need one-pager for each of the top solutions that explains the key points: why is Somerville doing this and how will it address climate change?
 - Need to explain in plan how we got to the top strategies in the plan.
- Final outcome – Goal should be to get the plan implemented and included in ordinances.
- Need to clearly show how much each solution will reduce GHG emissions (waterfall chart).