Repairing Providence's Storm and Sewer Systems

A Plan for Our Future

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CITY OF PROVIDENCE

Preparing Our City for More Extreme Weather By Investing in our Future

Every Providence resident deserves to feel confident that a heavy rainstorm won't flood their street, damage their home, or disrupt their neighborhood. But that's what's happening now. Storms are getting stronger and flooding is becoming more common, and the infrastructure we rely on is under greater strain than ever.

That's because much of our storm and sewer systems are more than 100 years old, and decades of delayed maintenance have left us vulnerable to flooding, sewer back-ups, and sinkholes.

Investing in our storm and sewer systems today protects our families, businesses, and the places we love, while preparing our city for a future with more extreme weather.

Providence's Plan

We are building a safer, stronger, more resilient city by:

- Repairing and upgrading aging pipes so they can handle today's storms.
- Adding green "infrastructure" like rain gardens, trees, and natural ponds to soak up rainwater and reduce flooding.
- Reducing polluted storm runoff that ends up in the waterways where we swim, fish, and paddle.



Following Best Practices

These improvements will take time and funding. Providence plans to follow proven practices used by other cities nationwide, like creating a dedicated fee for these repairs and improvements, rather than relying on taxes. This approach is fairer because it helps ensure what you pay is based on your impact on the system. The money collected would be set aside only to be used for storm and sewer work. The City is also designing credit and customer assistance programs to help residents who may need support paying these fees.

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Frequently Asked Questions

How have other cities been able to invest sustainably and fairly in their storm and sewer systems?
Thousands of cities across the country, including big cities nearby like Boston, are making much needed investments in their storm and sewer systems with a dedicated fee, paid by property owners, rather than using general fund money collected through taxes, which is how Providence currently funds these systems. Having a dedicated fee for these services is fairer because everyone pays for the services everyone uses and the fees are determined based on the property's demand for the services.

What will the fee pay for?
The fee will enable the City to repair, upgrade, and inspect storm and sewer pipes; clean and remove debris from streets; provide emergency flood response and repair; and create rain gardens and other green infrastructure that soaks up polluted storm runoff. In addition, it will cover the cost of the staff, equipment, permitting, and outreach needed to keep the system working. By law, the fee can only be spent on storm and sewer work.

How will my neighborhood benefit from more investments in addressing old storm and sewer pipes?
These investments will ensure storm runoff is properly channeled away from roads and properties, protecting public safety and property values by reducing neighborhood flooding, sewer back ups, and sinkholes. They also ensure less pollutants are funneled to our waterways, making them healthier for the people, plants, and animals that depend on them.

Doesn't my bill from the Narragansett Bay Commission already take care of this?
The Narragansett Bay Commission handles the treatment of wastewater. Their bill covers their pipes, their treatment plant and their newly constructed infrastructure to store and treat combined flows (sewage mixed with storm runoff). The City fee would cover the underground network of pipes and pumps that carry your wastewater to the Commission, or in the case of storm runoff, to the nearest waterway.

How will the City determine how much I owe?
Property owners will pay for storm runoff based on how much hard surface there is on the property, and they'll pay a sewer fee based on how much water they use. That ties the amount you pay to what you use. The money collected will go into a separate fund that can only be spent on storm and sewer work.

Why is the stormwater fee based on the amount of hard surfaces?
Because hard surface (also called impervious area) is what actually creates storm runoff. The more hard surface a property has, the more stormwater flows off it and into the system, so the more it contributes to flooding. Basing the fee on impervious area keeps it fair: you pay in proportion to the runoff your property creates, not your property's value or size alone.

How can I help reduce storm runoff pollution?
There are many actions community members can take to help play a part in Providence becoming more climate resilient, from keeping your storm drains clear to redirecting rain to a garden. Visit our website for more tips.

Learn more at climatereadypvd.providenceri.gov