

TOWN OF WESTPORT GREATER ROUTE 6 WATER AND SEWER PROJECT



Frequently Asked Questions

March 2024

This FAQ is based on the latest information available when created. While significant changes are not expected, factors like bid pricing, grant availability, and interest rates on loans could necessitate updates to these answers.

Contents

1. What is the difference between a septic system and a sewer system?	3
2. What is a “stub” (also known as a “lateral”)?	3
3. What is a pump station?	3
4. What is a gravity sewer/ force main?	3
5. Why is the town undertaking the water & sewer project?.....	3
6. What does the project entail & what are the limits?.....	4
7. Has the Route 6 water and sewer project been fully designed?	4
8. Has the cost estimate for the Route 6 water & sewer project been determined?	4
9. How will the project be paid for?.....	4
10. Has the town sought grants/loans for the project, what is the status?	5
11. Are there detailed reports available about the project?	5
12. When will construction start & how long will it take?.....	6
13. When will the sewer come to my street/neighborhood?.....	6
14. Is it mandatory for property owners to connect to the new water and/or sewer system?	6
15. Are there Tax Credits?.....	6
16. Is a property owner required to pay for connection costs?	7
17. Will there be a connection fee?	7
18. Is development anticipated because of the sewer project?.....	7
19. Will there be changes to the town’s Zoning Bylaws?	7
20. What will be the user fees?.....	7
21. Who will manage the system? / Estimated costs and plans for O&M?.....	8
22. Is my property subject to review by the Board of Health?	8
23. What will happen to my existing septic system if it is abandoned?	9
24. Will there be detours during sewer construction?	9
25. What are equivalent dwelling units (EDU’s)?.....	9
26. What are betterments?.....	9
27. Will there be any relief for seniors?	9
28. What is an enterprise fund?.....	9
29. Is it cheaper to upgrade my septic system or connect to sewer?.....	9
30. How will the residential property taxes be affected?	10
31. What are the annual betterment costs? Can I pay for it all at once or can I finance it?	10
32. What is a debt exclusion?	10
33. 2024 project related ballot question / Town Meeting articles?	10
34. Where can I get information?	11

1. What is the difference between a septic system and a sewer system?

Standard septic systems are located on individual lots and dispose of homes or business wastewater on-site. The solids remain in a tank and the liquid passes through and drains through the soil on the property. In contrast, a sewer system collects and transports waste to a central treatment facility, addressing specific issues like nutrient, bacteria, or metal removal. The key distinction is that septic systems remove solids but rely on soil for organic matter breakdown before reaching groundwater, making them less effective in removing nutrients that can degrade downstream water resources including drinking water wells and other water resources.

2. What is a “stub” (also known as a “lateral”)?

A stub is a section of pipe from the sewer main up to the property line that will facilitate the future connection of the building to the sewer main. The stub allows the property to be connected without digging up the roadway again. A stub is provided for each property to be connected to the sewer. Properties with multiple buildings, i.e., condominiums, will be provided with one stub.

3. What is a pump station?

A pump station is a facility designed to lift or raise sewerage when gravity sewer mains encounter low points due to natural topography or deep excavation. In such instances, pump stations are installed to elevate the sewerage and facilitate its discharge through a force main. The force main from the pump station can either convey the sewage directly to a treatment facility, another pumping station, or discharge it into another gravity sewer system. Pump stations are located at the low points in gravity collection systems. Pump stations’ designs will vary depending on their size and location. The proposed locations for the four new sewer pump stations include partial placement underground.

4. What is a gravity sewer/ force main?

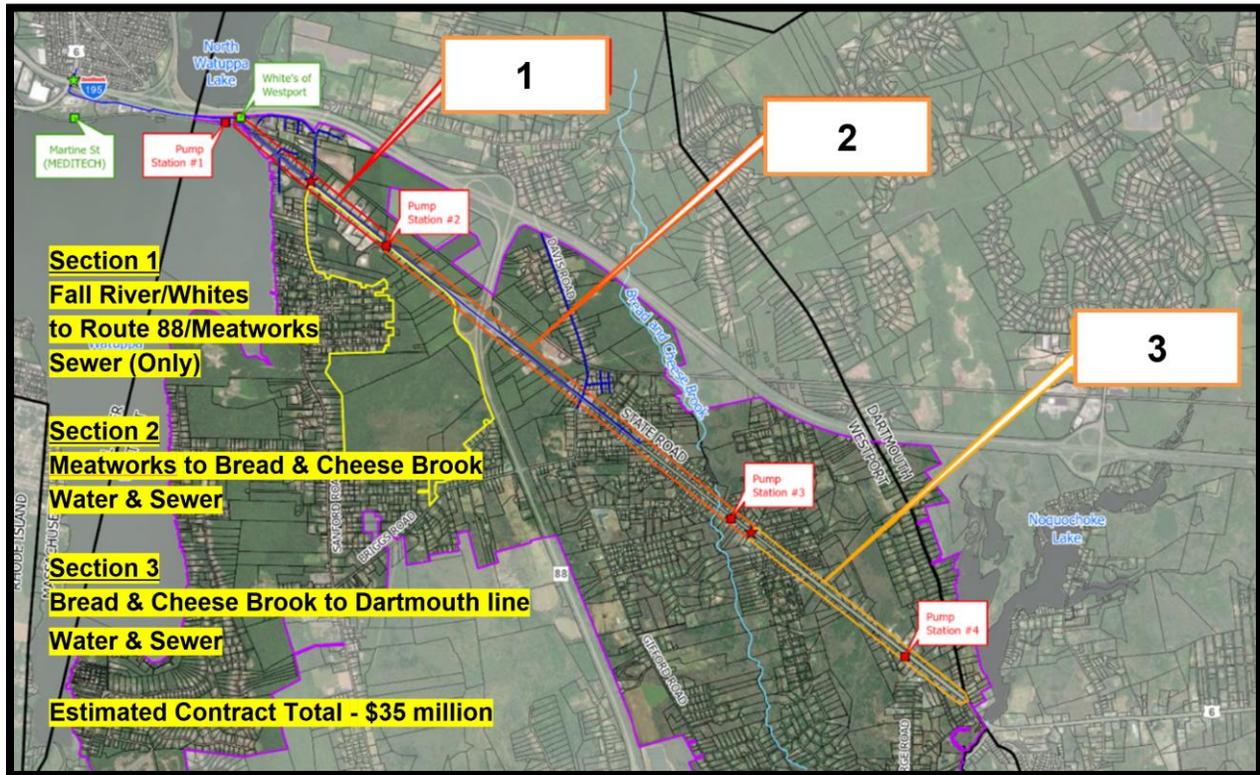
A gravity sewer uses downhill slopes in its pipes to let waste flow using gravity. A force main, however, uses pumps to move sewage uphill, requiring a pump station for properties to connect to it.

5. Why is the town undertaking the water & sewer project?

The 2016 Westport Master Plan highlights the absence of sewer infrastructure along Route 6 as a barrier to economic development, underscoring the need for its expansion. The 2020 Integrated Water Resource Management Plan prioritizes this sewer expansion to enhance water quality and align with the town's sustainability goals. Stakeholder engagement and public participation were integral, ensuring community perspectives shaped these initiatives. Recognized in these reports, the project not only supports economic development by attracting businesses and creating job opportunities but also addresses public health concerns by bringing clean drinking water to the greater Route 6 area. Pollution to the Westport River from septic systems is also addressed by collecting sewer and sending it to a treatment facility in Fall River for treatment and disposal. **The sewer expansion on Route 6 serves as a comprehensive solution, fostering economic growth, environmental sustainability, public health, and the overall well-being of the Westport community.**

6. What does the project entail & what are the limits?

The Project will install and connect a new sewer line and pump stations to the Fall River system. This project spans from the Fall River Line to the Dartmouth Line (Highland Ave); and will extend the existing waterline from Greenwood Terrace (E. Briggs Rd.) to the Dartmouth Line (Highland Ave).



7. Has the Route 6 water and sewer project been fully designed?

Yes, as of March 2024, the project has reached 100% completion in terms of design, and the final permitting process is currently in progress. We expect to have all necessary permits by the end of May 2024, including consolidating all three Brook contracts into one comprehensive contract covering both water and sewer aspects. The project is poised to receive bids and determine the contract value, contingent upon funding approvals from the Ballot and the 2024 Annual Town Meeting (ATM). Should the funding be approved, the Select Board plans to finalize a contract with the lowest bidder to commence the project. The contract is being bid with “add alternates” to maintain budget. A contract add alternate is a provision for work or features in a construction project, specified separately from the main contract. It allows flexibility to adjust the project scope based on budget and needs.

8. Has the cost estimate for the Route 6 water & sewer project been determined?

The Town's consultants have conducted a preliminary cost analysis for the combined water and sewer project, estimating it at around \$35 million. This figure will be refined after the town's bidding process for construction, planned before the 2024 Annual Town Meeting.

9. How will the project be paid for?

The Route 6 Water and Sewer Project in Westport comprises two key components: water and sewer, each with distinct financing strategies.

- a. **Water Aspect:** The water-related portion of the project adopts a town-wide cost-sharing model. This approach involves distributing the costs associated with the water infrastructure evenly across all taxable properties in Westport. As part of the overall \$35 million project, the water portion accounts for approximately \$5 million.
- b. **Sewer Aspect:** The financing for the sewer portion is based on a specific cost-sharing plan, which is allocated as follows:
 - **Sewer Betterments Assessment:** Around 20% of the total cost for the sewer portion of the project will be charged to the property owners where a new sewer connection becomes available. This will be done through an assessment known as "sewer betterments." The aim is to establish the cost per Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU) — representing the cost for a single-family residence — at about \$10,000.
 - **Town-Wide Contribution:** The remaining estimated 80% of the sewer project's expenses will be shared by the wider town population. This approach ensures that the cost is distributed more broadly, rather than being concentrated solely on those directly benefiting from the new infrastructure.

10. Has the town sought grants/loans for the project, what is the status?

Yes, the Town of Westport proactively sought various grants and low-interest loans to fund the Route 6 Water and Sewer Project. The pursuit of this financial aid aims to lower the overall project costs and reduce the financial burden on local taxpayers. Currently, the town has applied for and is awaiting responses regarding key funding opportunities. The status of these applications is being closely monitored, and any successful grants or loans will play a significant role in reducing the project's cost to the community.

11. Are there detailed reports available about the project?¹

Yes, detailed information about the Route 6 Water and Sewer Project is available in various reports on the Town of Westport's website. These reports cover a wide array of topics related to the project. A key document to note is the "Route 6 Sewer Preliminary Design Report - July 2020²," which provides an illustrative overview of the project's scope and limits.

You can access this report, along with other relevant documents, through the following link:

[Westport Planning Board Reports, Studies, and Projects.](#)

The available reports include:

- Route 6 Sewer Preliminary Design Report - July 2020
- Targeted-Integrated Water Resource Management Plan - January 2020³

¹ [LINK TO: 2021 Master Plan Update Final](#)

[LINK TO: 2019 Massachusetts Nutrient Management GIS Plan](#)

[LINK TO: 2013 Linked Watershed Abatement Approach For Critical Nitrogen Loading](#)

[LINK TO: 2017 Westport River Estuarine System TMDL Total Nitrogen Report \(CN 375.1\)](#)

² [LINK TO: Route 6 Sewer Preliminary Design Report – July 2020](#)

³ [LINK TO: 2020 Targeted Integrated Water Resource Management Plan Westport](#)

These reports provide comprehensive insights and analyses pertinent to the planning and execution of the project.

12. When will construction start & how long will it take?

Contingent upon funding, the project is slated to begin in the early fall of 2024 and will take 3 years to complete.

13. When will the sewer come to my street/neighborhood?

The current project only seeks to install the trunk line along Route 6 from the Fall River line to the Dartmouth line. Once this “back bone” of the sewer is constructed, it will allow the town to expand sewer into adjacent neighborhoods. **Under the current project schedule, the town does not anticipate installing sewer in neighborhoods adjacent to Route 6 until after the trunk line is installed which is a 3-year initiative.**

14. Is it mandatory for property owners to connect to the new water and/or sewer system?

No, property owners will not be required to connect to the new sewer system. However, it is important to note that **only** properties where a sewer connection is available will be subject to the sewer betterment assessment. This means that even if a property owner chooses not to connect to the sewer system, they will still be included in the betterment charges due to the availability of the service in their area.

Additionally, as part of the project, a sewer and water (water stub where new service is provided) stub will be provided at the property line for each of these properties. This provision is made so that if a property owner decides to connect to the water or the sewer system in the future, the necessary connection point will already be in place, facilitating an easier, less costly, and more efficient connection process.

15. Are there Tax Credits?

YES-In October 2023, Massachusetts introduced a significant tax credit for homeowners with failed septic systems who connect to municipal sewer.

KEY POINTS:

1. **Max Credit:** Up to \$18,000.
2. **Eligibility:** Homeowner must own and occupy the property, not be dependent on another taxpayer, and the system must be certified as "failed".
3. **Eligible Costs:** Costs for connecting to a municipal sewer system.
4. **Credit Calculation:** 60% of costs, up to \$30,000 project cost; \$4,000 annual limit, with excess carried over for up to 5 years.
5. **Claim Process:** Attach Certificate of Compliance and Schedule SC to Massachusetts Tax Return.
6. **Timing:** Credit available in the tax year when sewer connection work is completed.

For more information on the Massachusetts State Tax Credit:

16. Is a property owner required to pay for connection costs?

While connecting to the new water and sewer systems is optional for property owners, those who choose to do so will be responsible for the related costs. This includes hiring a contractor to connect their property's plumbing to the provided water and sewer lines at the property boundary. The cost of connection varies significantly due to factors like the property's distance from the street, elevation differences, landscaping, current septic system location, basement plumbing layout, and any engineering or permit requirements. Given these varying factors, determining a specific cost for each property is complex.

17. Will there be a connection fee?

Yes, Westport property owners will be required to pay a connection fee if you are connecting to the system. Fall River applies a fee for both water and sewer connections. For sewers, the city imposes a one-time connection fee, calculated at \$1.00 per gallon of the projected daily flow, based on the type of use. Westport may add an additional \$2.00 per gallon fee to Fall River's fee for operational, maintenance, and administrative costs. For single and multiple dwelling units, the fee is calculated per bedroom, and the standard rate is 110 gallons per day. For a 3-bedroom single-family home with a \$3 per gallon of daily flow projected at 110 gallons/day, the sewer connection fee would be \$990.

All new connections to the water system shall pay a one-time fee to the City of \$1.00 per gallon of the projected flow using the same methodology as the sewer fees. Using the 3-bedroom single-family home example, the water connection fee would also be \$990. Both water and sewer will be coming from Fall River. Future sewer and water charges will be assessed in accordance with actual usage.

18. Is development anticipated because of the sewer project?

Sanitary sewers can provide new development opportunities - however, zoning and conservation bylaws and regulations continue to impose restrictions on development, providing the town controls over new projects.

19. Will there be changes to the town's Zoning Bylaws?

The Planning Board is committed to zoning amendments at Town Meeting along Route 6, from Fall River to Route 88, to enable community-oriented development and amenities. The amendments would encourage more homes for Westporters and create new business opportunities for firms looking to invest in Westport.

20. What will be the user fees?

A property owner's ongoing costs will include a water and sewer service fee based on water usage. The projected user fees (rates) for Westport residents utilizing Fall River's water and future sewer services are as follows:

- **Water User Fees:**
The base rate charged to Fall River residents is \$3.77 per hundred cubic feet (ccf) of water. Westport users pay 55% more than this base rate, which amounts to \$5.84 per ccf. Additionally, there is a 25% charge for the operation and maintenance of the system, bringing the total water user fee for Westport residents to \$7.30 per ccf.

- Sewer User Fees:
The base rate for sewer services for Fall River residents is \$6.06 per ccf of effluent. Westport users are charged 55% more than the base rate, resulting in a rate of \$9.39 per ccf. Including some operation and maintenance charges, the total sewer user fee for Westport residents comes to \$11.74 per ccf.

For an average single-family home using 180 gallons of water per day, the monthly water and sewer charges would be approximately (One CCF is equal to 748 gallons):

Monthly water usage: 7.22 CCF
Water charge: \$52.70 (at \$7.30 per CCF)
Sewer charge: \$84.75 (at \$11.74 per CCF)
Total charge (water + sewer): \$137.45

These figures are approximate and may vary

21. Who will manage the system? / Estimated costs and plans for O&M?

The Town plans to establish a sewer commission responsible for overseeing and managing the system, including handling the enterprise fund (see question 28 for more detail on the enterprise fund). The 2024 Annual Town Meeting (ATM) will appoint the Board of Selectmen to serve as acting sewer commissioners. At a subsequent ATM, following the year 2024, the Town will officially establish an authorized Sewer Commission, which will be endowed with all powers enacted. Operational and maintenance costs are projected to be 25% higher than the current sewer rates charged by Fall River to Westport. This increase is designated to cover operations and maintenance (O&M) expenses. The enterprise fund will manage these fees as direct costs.

22. Is my property subject to review by the Board of Health?

Whether the Board of Health requires a sewer connection for your property in Westport, despite the project not mandating it, will depend on the outcomes of the health department's review, particularly during Title 5⁴ inspections. This decision is made on a case-by-case basis, focusing on the adequacy of existing septic systems and compliance with health and environmental standards. The Westport Local Septic System Regulation⁵ 13.0 may also influence this decision, outlining the conditions under which sewer connection becomes necessary.

The Westport Local Septic System Regulation 9.0 focuses on cesspools and their upgrade requirements. It stipulates that all cesspools in the Town of Westport must be upgraded to meet Title 5 standards by the earliest of the following dates: 1) the deadline established in Title 5 for systems failing to protect health, safety, welfare, or the environment; 2) when sanitary sewer or a cluster/shared nitrogen reducing system becomes available; or 3) by February 1, 2028. Additionally, the Board of Health can set a shorter deadline for cesspool upgrades in cases of imminent health hazards, per Title 5 guidelines.

⁴ [LINK TO: MA DEP Title V Regulations](#)

⁵ [LINK TO: Westport Local Septic System Regulation](#)

23. **What will happen to my existing septic system if it is abandoned?**

Your existing septic system can be abandoned in place, following the guidelines outlined in Title 5 regulations (310 CMR 15.354⁶). Typically, this process involves pumping the septic tank, creating holes in the tank's bottom, and then filling it with sand.

24. **Will there be detours during sewer construction?**

Every attempt is being made to minimize the necessity for detours during the project. Detours will primarily affect through traffic, with maintained access for local traffic. However, accessing specific locations may require alternate routes depending on the construction's location. While the construction process is likely to result in some isolated delays and impacts, every effort will be made to inform affected parties in advance, ensuring proactive notification of any potential disruptions.

25. **What are equivalent dwelling units (EDU's)?**

EDUs are Equivalent Dwelling Units and are an estimate of the average wastewater flow from a single-family dwelling charged to a sewer account. A single-family home would be 1 EDU whereas a four unit multifamily would be 4 EDUs or a business could be 7 EDUs.

26. **What are betterments?**

A betterment represents the cost of an improvement that increases the value of your property, such as a new water or sewer line. The assessment of a betterment is a method used to charge the cost of public improvements, which benefit a limited area, against the real estate situated within such area.

27. **Will there be any relief for seniors?**

The Town is proposing an article at 2024 ATM to allow qualifying seniors to defer the betterment charge.

Under G.L. c. 80, § 13B, if a city or town adopts these provisions, the Assessing Board may allow deferrals of betterments and special assessments for elderly property owners, akin to property tax deferrals. Eligibility for these deferrals is limited to those who qualify for property tax deferral under G.L. c. 59, § 5[41A]. Property owners must apply for deferral within six months of receiving the assessment notice, leading to a potential deferral and recovery agreement recorded in the Registry of Deeds.

28. **What is an enterprise fund?**

An enterprise fund is a self-supporting government financial system, typically used for services like utilities, where service costs are covered by user fees. The Town of Westport already operates a water enterprise fund and is planning to establish a sewer enterprise fund. In managing these funds, Westport will explore cost-saving synergies to optimize efficiency and financial sustainability. This system ensures that the costs of these services are borne by the users rather than by the general taxpayer base.

29. **Is it cheaper to upgrade my septic system or connect to sewer?**

The average cost to upgrade a cesspool to a conventional Title 5 system is about \$25,000. Title 5 septic systems are not designed to reduce nitrogen pollution. The average cost to upgrade a cesspool to a nitrogen reducing septic system that removes about half of the nitrogen is \$40,000. The betterment cost for this single-family residential property is an estimated \$10,000 per EDU and removes 100% of the

⁶ [LINK TO: 310 CMR 15.354 - Abandonment of Septic Systems](#)

nitrogen from the wastewater. It is cheaper to connect to sewer than it is to upgrade a failed septic system.

For detailed guidelines on soil absorption systems for new construction in relation to water bodies and wetlands, please refer to the specific provisions outlined in the Town of Westport Health Department's rules and regulations. These rules include restrictions on the proximity of these systems to various water sources and requirements for nitrogen-reducing systems under certain conditions. For precise requirements and any potential variances, it's essential to consult the Health Department's regulations, particularly those sections pertaining to the construction and repair of onsite sewage disposal systems.

30. How will the residential property taxes be affected?

Based on the current project estimate:

- The total cost for townwide sewer and water infrastructure improvements is \$29 million, with \$24 million allocated for sewers (80% of the total cost) and \$5 million for water (20%).
- The proposed tax rate impact per \$1,000 of assessed value is \$0.35 for sewer and \$0.07 for water, leading to a total impact of \$0.42.
- The estimated new tax rate per \$1,000 of assessed value will be \$8.15.
- The average single-family home, with an assessed value of \$596,159, currently has a tax bill of \$4,608.
- The estimated impact of these infrastructure costs on the average single-family tax bill is an increase of \$250 or approximately **\$4.81/week for 20-years**.

***The final tax implication will be based on the final project bid.

31. What are the annual betterment costs? Can I pay for it all at once or can I finance it?

Property owners can either pay the entire betterment fee at once or opt for a 20-year finance plan. For an Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU) valued at \$10,000, the yearly betterment cost is about \$800, based on a 3.75% finance rate. This means a single-family home, which is equivalent to one EDU, would have an approximate betterment fee of \$10,000. Only properties being assessed a betterment, will be assessed a betterment fee.

32. What is a debt exclusion?

A debt exclusion is a temporary increase in property tax beyond statutory limits, specifically used by municipalities to fund a large project or repay a debt. This measure is not permanent; it only lasts until the debt for the specific project is paid off, in this case 20-years.

33. 2024 project related ballot question / Town Meeting articles?

- Ballot Vote for Debt Approval: **April 9, 2024**
- Town Meeting, May 2024
 - \$35 Million Funding for Water and Sewer System Construction with Debt Exclusion
 - Authorization for Sewer Betterment Assessments Based on Uniform Unit Method
 - Establishment of Sewer Commission with Deferral of Betterment Assessments for Qualifying Seniors Eligible for Exemption
 - Creation of Sewerage Service as an Enterprise Fund

34. Where can I get information?

Visit the Town Infrastructure Oversight Committee webpage for updated information that includes progress updates. <https://www.westport-ma.com/infrastructure-oversight-committee>