

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Learning about stormwater management in Agawam**

When rainfall hits the ground, it can move in mysterious ways. If it hits earth, it often soaks in. If it hits a rooftop, driveway, parking lot, or roadway, chances are it will run off into the nearest street drain, move through a series of pipes and then out to a nearby stream, and the Westfield and Connecticut rivers. But it can pool in many places as well, especially where the drainage system itself is failing.

In Agawam, the Public Works Department maintains some 4,757 street drains (aka catch basins), 122 miles of drain pipe, and 2,352 manholes to convey storm flows to the Town's 512 outfalls that outlet to waterways (which themselves involve some 3.2 miles of culverts maintained by Public Works). To most of us, this storm system is invisible. Only when things start to fall apart or fail, does it become clear that this infrastructure is critically important. While roughly 17% of this system was installed in the last 30 years, the rest of the system is older or the age is unknown.

At the same time, important new Clean Water Act permit requirements seek to reduce polluted storm flows from developed areas to rivers and streams. These requirements entail water quality sampling within the storm system, promoting stormwater management practices that better soak up rather than convey rainfall, and more frequent street sweeping and street drain cleaning, among other actions. Public Works Director Chris Golba notes, "When you align proper care of our aging storm system with these new permit requirements, we have our work cut out for us."

A newly formed 10-member Stormwater Advisory Task Force is working currently with Agawam Public Works officials to help figure out how to better fund the work of caring for the storm system and reduce polluted flows from developed areas. For years, storm system work has been funded through the Town's General Fund. With the age of the system and expanded Clean Water

Act permit requirements, the level of effort and costs for this work will increase significantly. The amount of this increase is something that consultant Amec Foster Wheeler is evaluating for the Task Force through interviews with Public Works officials about the system, and careful review of available data and effort needed to meet permit requirements over the next 5 years and beyond.

In the coming months, Task Force members will be learning all they can about stormwater and how it is managed in Agawam so that by year's end, they can make recommendations on the services that should be provided and how best to proceed with funding the program. This preliminary work in exploring sustainable funding for the stormwater program is made possible through a MassDEP 319 grant to the Pioneer Valley Planning Commission, which has been working closely with Public Works officials. This project will also include a lot of conversation with stakeholders to understand what stormwater issues most concern residents and businesses. For starters, the project has a web page that contains a summary of the project, materials from the two recent Task Force meetings, and an interactive map identifying problem stormwater drainage locations. See: <http://www.agawam.ma.us/SW-TaskForce>.

Members of the Stormwater Advisory Task Force are: City Councilors James Cichetti, Christopher Johnson, and Robert Rossi, Former Mayor Susan Dawson, Resident Herbert Holl, Reverend Rob Donaldson, Conservation Commissioner Henry Kosloski, Allied Flooring and Paint Owner Mario Tedeschi, Six Flags New England Facilities Manager Dave Jenks, Public Works Director Chris Golba, and Town Engineer Michelle Chase.