Messaging & Public Relations: Addressing Local Concerns
1. Introduction

2. It’s Never to Early to Start Building Your Case

3. Public Engagement Strategy

4. So... How did Gallatin & Portland begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?

5. After Stormwater Utility Implemented
The City of Gallatin was established in 1802. Located northeast of Nashville and is nestled on the banks of both Old Hickory Lake and the Cumberland River.

71 Stream Miles, 14 Miles of Old Hickory Lake Shoreline

Population: Approximately 40,000

The City is located at the bottom of several watersheds and often experiences flooding events.
Introduction

The City of Portland was settled in 1632

Roughly 40 percent of all Maine residents live in the greater Portland metropolitan area

Situated on the Portland peninsula near Maine’s southernmost border

America’s 20th-largest fishing port

Despite having a population of just 60,000, Portland boasts an impressive 17 microbreweries – clean water is imperative!
Introduction

Recurrent issues highlighted a need for increased funding and a dedicated revenue source. Engineering Division realized it was time to begin planning for a Stormwater Utility Fee. Where and How to Start?
Stormwater Finance Flow Chart

1. Create a Preliminary Stormwater Management Plan
   - Know your current assets and future needs

2. Create a Stormwater Finance Task Force
   - Generate community and political support for financing solutions

3. Consider Payment Strategies
   - Evaluate finance options and establish criteria to choose best option

4. Launch Stormwater Financing Program
   - Establish a dedicated source of funding to support future projects

5. Post-Implementation Sustainability Measures
   - Ensure ongoing transparency to the community
It's Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

Track and Compile Any and All Pertinent Information

- Drainage Complaint Records & Resolutions
  - Calls to staff
  - Calls to elected officials
- Photographic and Video Evidence
- Engineering and Maintenance Staff Knowledge
- History of Flood/Extreme Rain Events – rainfall data amounts
- Economic Impacts - $ Damages
- Flood Insurance Repetitive Loss $ Amounts
- Any Master and Watershed Basin Plans
- Completed Projects List
- Future Projects List
It’s Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

The Benefits for Enacting a Sustainable Financing Plan

*Always keep these at the front of your mind!*

You are promoting a stormwater utility because your community benefits from:

- Taking Public Safety Seriously
- Clean Water
- Pro-actively Addressing Drainage Problems
- Maintaining and Improving Aging Stormwater Infrastructure
- Better Economic Development
- More Attractive Neighborhoods and Downtowns
- Dedicated Revenue for Scheduling Capital Improvement Projects
It’s Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

The Benefits for Enacting a Sustainable Financing Plan

*Always keep these at the front of your mind!*

Neutralize negative political comments

- Clearly addressing facts and benefits
- Remaining calm and professional

Listen to critics, allow them to voice their opinions

- Empathy and understanding

Calmly explain the benefits and why a fee may be a better way to manage local infrastructure concerns

Embrace your advocates – encourage them to help educate and promote benefits
It’s Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

Concurrently, compile a list of available resources to guide you:

No need to re-invent the wheel!

Websites dedicated to New Jersey Stormwater Utility Implementation Assistance

Consider Hiring an Experienced Consultant

Funding Stormwater Programs

New England Case Studies

New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station

Stormwater Utilities in New Jersey – Frequently Asked Questions

What is Stormwater?

Stormwater is a catchment of water that flows as precipitation, floods, and snowmelt, and drains into rivers, lakes, estuaries, and oceans. Stormwater can include rainwater, melted snow, and other water that flows into the surface water system. Stormwater can also include water that flows from agricultural, commercial, and industrial areas.

Consequences of Stormwater Pollution

Stormwater contains a variety of pollutants, including sediment, nutrients, heavy metals, and other chemicals. These pollutants can harm aquatic life, affect human health, and degrade water quality. Stormwater pollution can also cause flooding and erosion, which can lead to property damage and loss of life.

Funding Stormwater Programs

There are several funding opportunities available for stormwater management projects. These include state and federal grants, private foundations, and local funding sources. In addition, some communities have created stormwater utility programs to provide funding for stormwater management projects.

New Jersey Stormwater Utility Implementation Assistance

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What is New Jersey Stormwater Utility Implementation Assistance?

New Jersey Stormwater Utility Implementation Assistance is a program that provides funding and technical assistance to municipalities and counties for the implementation of stormwater management programs. The program is funded by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) and is administered by the New Jersey Stormwater Program.

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State and National Stormwater Associations

- **Tennessee Stormwater Association**
- **National Municipal Stormwater Alliance**

**Motivation for Formation**

- To represent MS4 permittees at the national level by providing a **unified voice**
- To lead changes in regulation both **proactively and reactively**
- To **connect and unite** MS4 programs
- To promote stormwater as a **resource**
- To improve the **public image of stormwater**
- To create opportunities for **multi-benefit and multi-use stormwater projects**
It’s Never too Early to Start Building Your Case

Concurrently, compile a list of available resources to guide you:

Water Environment Federation

Local Officials Toolkit - Draft

Initial Final Fact Sheets by December 2021

The following general topics:

- Stormwater Management Fundamentals
- Stormwater Treatment Types
- Stormwater Treatment with Green Infrastructure
- Incorporating Equity and Inclusion in Messaging
- Resiliency
Public Engagement Strategy

Develop a Public Outreach Plan:

- Prepare/Design Brochures
- Billing Notices
- Community Meetings
- One-on-One Meetings with Large Fee Payers
- Speakers Bureaus
- Media Relations (Social Media, Public TV Channel, Radio, Website, Newsprint)
- Educational Video
- Meetings with Elected Officials
Public Engagement Strategy

Consider forming a stakeholder group with various interested parties:

**Advantages**
- Message tested in small group before distribution at large
- Feedback is immediate
- Once consensus reached, stakeholder committee members become advocates/champions

**Disadvantages**
- It takes time to do correctly
- Each stakeholder must agree with the process and have sufficient responsibility
- The facilitator is the key to success
Don’t Get Sued! Know New Jersey’s Enabling Legislation

“...any county or municipality may... establish a stormwater utility for the purposes of acquiring, constructing, improving, maintaining, and operating stormwater management systems...

“A stormwater utility ... shall be considered a separate operation of the authority to be budgeted and accounted for separately”

“Any fee or other charge ... shall be based on a fair and equitable approximation of the proportionate contribution of stormwater runoff from a real property...
So... How did Gallatin begin the messaging for a Stormwater Utility?

Biggest hurdles in concept:
- Idea that this is a Rain TAX
- Decision maker turnover - Elections
- Were we doing a “good enough” job?

Positive Considerations
- When we seriously began pursuing the Utility, 2017 was not an Election year!
- Chose to initially present multiple short 20 minute presentations to City Council
- Then present to local Civic groups
- By this time, several Middle Tennessee communities had implemented a Stormwater Utility
What did we present on?

Three City Council Presentations

- Overview on Stormwater Basics & Requirements of the MS4 Permit
- Stormwater Challenges & Existing Stormwater Level of Service
- Stormwater Utility – A Sustainable Solution

Points that were Highlighted & Reiterated

- Aging infrastructure
- Increase in drainage complaints; City was reactive and not pro-active
- No routine infrastructure maintenance or rehabilitation
- Safety concerns
- Have to request and compete for $ from general fund, no dedicated funding source
Who did we present to?

Community Presentations

Presented on Stormwater Basics, MS4 permit, Level of Service and Stormwater Utility as a Solution

Who to Present to?

Civic Groups: Lions Clubs, Rotary Clubs, Sertoma Clubs
Home Owner Associations
Chambers of Commerce
Industrial Boards
Economic & Development Agencies

After successfully receiving Community Support...
Who Knew? City Council Approval – That May Not Be A Problem!

Next Hurdle: Make sure to communicate with, and bring City Departments on board...

Know your Critics and spend time to educate those Departments:

- Economic Development Agencies
- Public Utilities
- Public Works
After the Stormwater Utility ...

After the Utility is passed, billing is put into place and the fee collection begins...

Public Education Continues!

Initially there will be a flurry of phone calls and complaints

Continue to promote the benefits messaging

Remind the caller that potential credits may be available

My main message: A fee is always a better choice over a tax. It is a dedicated and transparent revenue source that is fair and equitable across the city – everyone who lives on or leases real property contributes to stormwater runoff and utilizes city infrastructure and thus pays into this fund that is solely used for stormwater management.

You Will Be Successful!
Questions?

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