

MDC STATEMENT ON SEWAGE AND FLOODING ISSUES IN HARTFORD

January 18, 2023
For Immediate Release

January 17th Meeting

Last Friday, January 13, 2023, The Metropolitan District (MDC) was made aware of an upcoming community meeting, in fact held yesterday afternoon, regarding resident concerns over sewage and flooding issues in Hartford. Although not invited to the meeting, MDC Chairman William Dibella, CEO Scott Jellison and MDC Commissioner Diane Lewis were in attendance to hear what the residents had to say. The meeting was publicized as a discussion between officials from the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and residents. Ultimately, the EPA did not attend the meeting, apparently, according to meeting organizer Bridgette Prince, because EPA did not commit to a public meeting with news media present. The MDC understands that EPA officials will follow up with the Ms. Prince directly.

The Clean Water Project

Over the past 15 years, the MDC Board of Commissioners and its ratepayers have approved \$1.6B for wastewater infrastructure upgrades as part of the Clean Water Project (CWP). Most of these upgrades relate to construction activity within the City of Hartford, projects which include combined sewer separation, treatment plant expansion and construction of an 18-foot diameter underground tunnel designed to mitigate sewage overflows during certain defined storm events. The CWP is the largest wastewater infrastructure construction project in all of New England. Since the project began, more than half of the combined sewer overflows to local waterways have been eliminated.

The current phase of the project is referred to as the "Integrated Plan" which now allows the MDC to use CWP funds to rehabilitate existing wastewater infrastructure as necessary generally, and not only solely for building new capacity, which was a limitation previously imposed by regulators. This next phase, which will take place over several decades, was finalized and approved by CT DEEP in the fall of 2022. The next phase of projects can begin without any additional referenda, thereby expediting the work.

The MDC is on schedule to share the communication plan for the construction schedule with regulators and the public this spring. As a reminder, these projects are designed to address sewage overflows, not street flooding.

Addressing Statements from at Last Night's Meeting

The meeting was organized in part due to storm events from August 19, 22 as well as September 1 2021, during which more than 7 inches of rain fell within the Hartford region within a compressed period. This storm represents a 200-year storm rain event (a rain event so significant that the likelihood of occurring is once every 200 years), where the MDC's CWP \$3 billion-dollar mandate from EPA and the CT DEEP is only to control up to a 1-year storm for the combined sewer/stormwater system in Hartford. Both State and Federal Regulators recognized that the cost to capture and treat stormwater generated from more significant rain events (i.e. 200-year storms) is prohibitive and therefore unaffordable to the ratepayer.

At the meeting, it was reported that a private property in the Tower Avenue area was surcharged during a rain storm event on December 2022, and during the event the MDC's Backwater valve (a device that

protects private property sewer piping from being surcharged by the main sewer system during storm events) failed. Ultimately causing the home to be condemned. MDC has documented this incident with both DEEP and EPA, emphasizing the fact that this sewer back up was directly due to blockage 10 feet outside the foundation walls. This is well within that portion of the lateral that is the homeowner's responsibility. The maintenance and repair of the sewer lateral from the house to the main sewer, as well as the backwater valve device, are the responsibility of the homeowner.

Another claim mentioned last night, which has been fully reviewed by MDC in concert with the all affected Albany Avenue property owners, occurred during August/September 2021 rain events. The August 19th event alone generated approximately 2-3 feet of water in Albany Avenue as a result of 7 inches of rain falling in less than an 8-hour time frame. It was determined all the damage incurred to this location was a direct result of this significant storm which this system, and frankly no similar system, is designed to withstand. The claim was denied.

There are legitimate combined sewer backups in basements which will be addressed during the next phase of the CWP; however, stormwater, which during these significant rain events is the primary cause of basement backups and street flooding, and cannot be addressed by the MDC, through the CWP alone.

To be clear, the CWP is only a part of the solution. Stormwater entering our sewer pipes is the driving force behind overflows to the CT River, city streets, businesses and homes.

MDC, the City of Hartford, State of Connecticut and the Federal Government are working together on solutions to manage the stormwater which creates localized flooding, property damage and impacts the community's public health and welfare.

Next Steps for the CWP / Stormwater and Street Flooding

The MDC continues to partner with the City of Hartford on a drainage study of the North Branch of the Park River and the Granby/Blue Hill areas, which will identify the construction project work and priorities necessary under Phase 1 of the new CWP Integrated Plan. The Park River serves as the receiving water body for storm water separated from MDC's combined sewer system. This calls for a vibrant partnership needed with the City, State and EPA, since MDC will separate the sewer and stormwater pipes in your streets. Clearly, the issue of flooding cause by multiple historic storms, such as the three that took place in 2021, is a regional one that the MDC cannot mitigate alone without additional support, funding assistance and investments from municipal, state and federal government.

Once the drainage study is completed, MDC will begin the design and prioritization of sewer separation projects in the Granby/Blue Hills areas, starting construction in spring of 2025.

MDC will be initiating a communications plan which will include input from the major stakeholders within these communities. MDC plans to be meeting with stakeholders this February with a presentation to the MDC's Bureau of Public Works on March 1, 2023.

Backwater Valve Program

In addition to the CWP (a separate funding source), in the short term the MDC has added \$2 million a year to its annual sewer operating budget to deal with sewer backup issues in several other MDC towns, including Hartford. In addition, our existing MDC backwater valve program protects basement fixtures from sewer backups during rain events when the sewer pipes no longer have adequate capacity. The MDC has been working with the City of Hartford staff to identify other improvements to address surface water flooding that is outside of the MDC's program.

MDC proactively reaches out to customers directly in areas prone to flooding with this program and through town officials. (See link for more information)

<https://themdc.org/utility-services/backwater-valve-program/>

The MDC wants to be part of the solution. We look forward to not only doing our part to mitigate sewage issues in our towns but to continue working with municipal, state and federal officials to find comprehensive solutions to these ongoing issues for our customers.