

Four Corners Sanitary Sewer Project

Project Overview ▪ *Updated August 14, 2014*

What is the Four Corners Sanitary Sewer Project?

The Town of Mansfield is proposing to build a sanitary sewer system to serve businesses and homes in the Four Corners area (Route 195/Route 44 intersection). The system would serve 61 properties and would include underground piping with stub connections to each property line, two pump stations where needed, and a connection to the University of Connecticut's sewer system for treatment at their wastewater treatment facility.

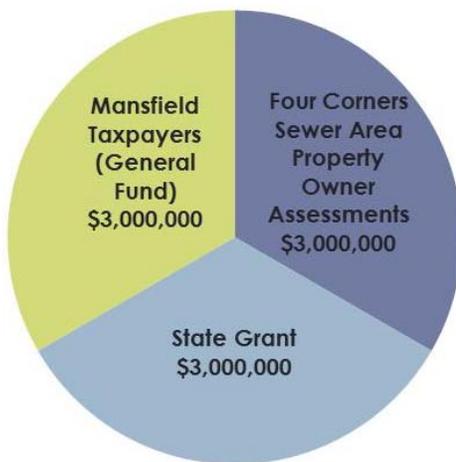
Why is a sanitary sewer system needed?

A high groundwater table, the presence of wetlands and poor draining soils throughout the area have substantially limited the long-term functioning of on-site septic disposal systems, resulting in the need for frequent pumping and numerous instances of septic system failure. Since 1998, there have been ten documented overflows/failures and twenty seven repairs. Septic failures create hardship for the property owner and as these occurrences become more frequent, the influx of nutrients and sewage-related bacteria eventually contaminate wells, wetland systems and water bodies.

Individual septic failures are indicative of what will become a widespread problem as the systems age. The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and the Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD) are aware of the potential for continued environmental and public health threats. Under state statute, the DEEP Commissioner can order a community to abate an existing pollution problem. While the Town has not received an abatement order, DEEP has been monitoring the Town's progress on addressing contamination issues in the Four Corners area. If an abatement order were to be issued, the Town would be required to identify, fund and implement projects to eliminate the source of the pollution.

In addition to addressing environmental concerns, the installation of a sanitary sewer system also presents opportunities to revitalize one of the town's three main commercial hubs. Located at the intersection of two state roads, Four Corners has been a center of commercial activity for decades, and a focus for commercial growth since the Town adopted its first Plan of Development in 1971. However, the lack of water and sewer infrastructure has made it difficult for businesses to thrive and limited the types of businesses that can locate in the area to those with low water needs. With public water scheduled to be available in mid-2016 upon completion of the Connecticut Water Company pipeline, the opportunity exists to direct new commercial and mixed-use development to the Four Corners. Redevelopment of long-vacant buildings and introduction of new businesses will improve the visual appearance of this northern gateway to town and expand the commercial tax base.

How much will the project cost and how will we pay for it?



Based on preliminary design, the total project cost is estimated at \$9 million dollars, to be financed through town and state funds. The Town received a \$3 million dollar grant from the Connecticut General Assembly in May 2014. The remaining \$6 million would be funded through issuance of a bond that would be repaid over the course of twenty years. To help reduce the cost of the project to the general taxpayer, the Town Council acting as the WPCA can assess property owners in the Four Corners sewer service area for some or all of the project cost. At this time, it is estimated that approximately one third of the project cost (\$3 million) would be recovered through property owner assessments.

Property owner assessments are based on formulas established in the Town's sewer ordinance and typically involve annual payments to the Town over an extended time period; in no case would an assessment payment schedule be longer than the term of the bond. These assessments would include a proportionate share of the debt service (interest) on the bond issued to fund the project. The WPCA would not establish assessments until after the project has been constructed and a public hearing is held to allow residents and affected property owners to comment.

How much would my taxes change if a bond is approved?

Assuming that taxpayers are responsible for paying for \$3 million of the project cost, the estimated increase in taxes for the median household with a Fair Market Value of \$242,710 (property assessed at \$169,900) would be \$47 in the first year of the bond to cover the cost of debt service (principal and interest related to the bond). This amount would decrease in subsequent years as the cost of debt service decreases over the life of the bond. It is also possible that actual tax increases to cover debt service costs could be smaller if the costs are absorbed by other increases in town revenues, such as those generated by Storrs Center and redevelopment in the Four Corners area.

What benefits will the project provide?

The installation of sewers will provide a long-term solution to failing septic systems, thus improving the quality of life of affected property owners while avoiding further environmental degradation. The project is also anticipated to provide economic benefits for the entire community through business retention and growth of the commercial tax base.

Environmental Benefits

- **Healthy environmental systems** – contamination from failing septic systems can result in bacteria and nutrient loading in adjacent wetlands and water bodies such as Cedar Swamp; elimination of this contaminant source will help to improve the health of these important natural systems.
- **Healthy human environment** – failing septic systems can result in waste seeping to the surface where humans are more likely to come in contact; providing a long-term, permanent solution to failing septic systems will eliminate this health hazard.

- **Clean water** – installation of a sanitary sewer system will help protect groundwater sources from wastewater contamination due to failing septic systems.

Economic Benefits

- **Property Values** – failing septic systems can make it difficult to sell property and reduce property value due to the need for costly repairs.
- **Business and job retention** – lack of adequate infrastructure can impact day-to-day business operations, increasing the possibility that businesses will relocate to another area.
- **Business growth/expansion** – availability of public water and sewer systems will improve the viability of the Four Corners as a mixed-use center that can support a variety of residential and commercial uses.
- **Increased commercial tax base** – with over one half of the town’s grand list exempt from taxes, increasing the commercial tax base can help to reduce the tax burden on single-family property owners over the long-term.

Who decides if the project gets built?

If the project is approved by the WPCA and Town Council, Mansfield voters will ultimately decide whether the project gets constructed. Voters would be asked to approve an appropriation and borrowing authorization for a sanitary sewer system project at an estimated cost of \$9,000,000. Approximately \$6,000,000 in bonding would be required to fund the Town’s portion of the project cost after the receipt of a \$3,000,000 grant administered by the State of Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection. The Town Charter requires that issuance of bonds in excess of 1% of the Town’s annual budget be approved at referendum by at least 15% of registered voters. Non-resident property owners may also vote on bond referenda.

If approved, when would the sewers be constructed?

Final design and construction is anticipated to take approximately two years. As the Town will need to coordinate construction of the sewer project with the Connecticut Water Company water pipeline extension to UConn, completion of the sewer project is expected in fall 2016.

Next Steps

- **Friday, August 22, 2014.** The Town Council, acting as the WPCA, will hold a public hearing on the proposed sanitary sewer system at 6:00 p.m. in the Council Chambers of the Audrey P. Beck Municipal Building at 4 South Eagleville Road.
- **Tuesday, September 2, 2014.** The Town Council, acting as the WPCA, will decide whether to move forward with the project at a Special Meeting anticipated for Tuesday, September 2, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. in the Town Council Chambers. If the WPCA authorizes construction of the sanitary sewer system, the Town Council at the same meeting will vote on whether to hold a referendum on **Tuesday, November 4th** regarding the issuance of bonds to fund the design and construction of the project.

Comments on the proposed project and bond issuance can be provided to the Town Council in person at the above meetings or submitted to the Town Clerk in advance (TownClerk@mansfieldct.org).