



DEM Report Suggests Ways to Cover Town's Stormwater Costs

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Middletown is not alone among coastal towns in facing infrastructure and repair costs related to ensuring that stormwater runoff is properly managed and doesn't negatively impact water quality. But with a majority of Aquidneck Island's watershed areas located in Middletown, stormwater management is a reality the town takes seriously. Such work as the \$3 million Esplanade outfall replacement project currently underway by the Department of Public Works is just one such example.

A feasibility study that the Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management completed recently describes a stormwater utility as one approach the town might take to cover the costs of stormwater management.

The report, "Stormwater Utility District Feasibility Study Final Report, Middletown, Rhode Island" (see PDF attached), analyzed the town's current and future stormwater management costs, and found that the existing annual cost of \$472,000 is likely to rise to \$924,000, because of various projects and requirements related to stormwater equipment.

Instead of paying for those projects in a "pay as you go" manner—such as the bond passed by the town to fund the Esplanade project—the report suggests that a stormwater utility be established to collect fees. "A stormwater utility generates revenue through user fees that are based upon the amount of stormwater generated on a property," the report states.

Stormwater utilities have been established in many parts of the country already, although Rhode Island does not yet have one. The fees that the utility would charge are based on an evaluation of a property's impervious surfaces—such as paved driveways or parking lots—which contribute to stormwater management problems because the water cannot be naturally absorbed into the ground. The report includes an analysis of Middletown's impervious cover, which was completed using a satellite and aerial photography analysis software called ENVI.

The report used a revenue goal of \$1 million annually as the target Middletown could raise via a stormwater utility, and suggested a rate structure to do so: "A typical single family homeowner in Middletown would pay \$49.82/yr or \$4.15/mo." According to current property tax rates in

Middletown, it would cost a typical single family homeowner more than twice as much (\$116.55) to raise the same \$1 million without a stormwater utility.

The next steps suggested in the report include creating a stakeholder group and gathering public input.