

Sustainable Water Infrastructure Task Force  
Public Input – We want to hear from you!!!  
Sustainable Water Infrastructure Task Force  
Questions & Answers

Needs Assessment

- What are the total infrastructure financing needs, and what are the causes for those needs?

Infrastructure financing needs have been exacerbated by the practice of encouraging infrastructure construction by private developers who then turn the infrastructure over to municipal authorities that do not have the financial or technical resources to maintain the infrastructure. The municipalities believe they are getting something for nothing, 'a gift'. In fact it is the developer who has received a substantial increase in development capacity of their property and the resultant healthy return on their investment. The municipality and its taxpayers are burdened with the long-term management and maintenance of infrastructure that begins deteriorating soon thereafter.

In addition, public policy has historically directed capital investment away from maintaining and upgrading existing infrastructure. Public policy has focused funding of new infrastructure in agricultural, 'greenfields' away from existing urban areas.

- Should we include in our needs assessment non-capital costs?

To protect the health, safety and welfare of all Pennsylvania residents, maintenance and upgrading of existing infrastructure, even when not associated with capital investment, must be included in any needs assessment.

- Should we be taking affordability into account in estimating financing needs? In other words, how should we factor in that some communities can afford a higher percentage of the total financing need than other communities?

Planning for sustainable infrastructure of any kind must involve sustainable planning for the future, which must include protecting the health, safety and welfare of our most needy citizens. Spending public money on repairing existing infrastructure should be the highest priority before constructing any new infrastructure. Wealthier communities can afford to spend more of their resources on maintenance of existing infrastructure.

Sustainable infrastructure planning should involve a tiered strategy. Existing urban areas must be funded first. Older suburbs next. As the distance increases from city center, the policy should evolve into one of protection of surface and groundwater supplies, as more development relies on groundwater for potable water. Likewise, most public water supplies are

drawn from outlying areas, thus the water protection policy would benefit all users.

#### Innovative Measures:

- What are the types of new technologies or treatment concepts and non-structural alternatives available to improve water quality in lieu of infrastructure? What is their effectiveness? What are the costs and benefits?

The protection of pristine groundwater supplies is the most sustainable and cost-efficient approach to long-term potable water supply. This would involve protecting groundwater by purchasing land or limiting construction in groundwater recharge areas.

- What other types of non-structural solutions are available to enhance system planning efforts? How can they be incorporated into a system's planning process? How can trading, water conservation and reuse strategies be incorporated into this planning process?

Non-structural solutions can include sustainable land use planning by municipalities and judicious implementation of existing statutes and ordinances to drive the location of infrastructure. Conscientious ground and surface water protection policies and strategies must be implemented in the very near future, or all water will require treatment. A sustainable approach to drinking water supply should not depend on the assumption that all water will require treatment. It is unwise to assume that treatment technology in the future will be able to correct and treat all water pollution.

#### Financial Resources:

- What aspects of the operation of a water or wastewater system should be eligible for subsidized funding from the local, state or federal government? How about onlot system management and the promotion of community sewage management programs?

Funding must be prioritized by need and the overall cost of the improvement. On lot system management and community management programs could be marginally subsidized as an incentive, perhaps as a tax break. Homeowners should absorb the cost of maintaining on lot systems that they own. Some community treatment systems could benefit from low interest loans or grants. Towns and boroughs with aging public systems used by taxpayers will need financial aid and technical expertise to bring the systems to optimal function.

#### Financial Sustainability:

- What methods and tools should be developed to assist water and wastewater systems in delivering cost-effective service while maintaining public health, safety and environmental standards?

Methods and tools could include training for municipal official officials in sustainable land use planning that would reduce and limit the extension of infrastructure into areas not planned for development. Encouraging compact, cost-effective land use development patterns would protect the public health, safety and environmental quality by limiting the extension of infrastructure to the point where it becomes very costly and difficult to maintain.

- Are there specific workforce and management training programs that should be developed to assist water and wastewater system staff to more effectively operate and manage their systems?

Training programs should include land use planning for water authority personnel. Authorities trade water as a commodity, not a resource necessary for the public health. The lack of controls on how water companies approve new service connections and extensions harms the public welfare by creating unmanageable development patterns for municipalities. Poor land use planning practices perpetuate the construction of inefficient and costly infrastructure. Standards should be established for the planning and management of public systems that will empower the smaller municipalities.

- What methods can be employed to encourage cost-effective sizing of systems, including regionalization or decentralization? Are there specific incentives that would be necessary to facilitate this approach? Does regionalization to create efficiencies of scale make sense generally, or only in certain circumstances?

Sustainable land use planning must be implemented to facilitate the cost-effective construction of infrastructure. Water companies that promise to serve water to speculative developers are not required to include the input of the home municipalities. Both sewer and water infrastructure require costly equipment to drive the system. Unplanned extension of infrastructure into areas not planned for growth taxes inadequate systems, causing a reduction in the efficiency and quality of service to others. Regional management may make sense, but regional infrastructure requires ever greater energy and machinery to function and becomes more and more problematic to maintain as it becomes more complicated.

- What eligibility criteria would you apply if additional state financing was devoted to water infrastructure?

Eligibility should include existing infrastructure in established urban areas, with the oldest and neediest infrastructure taking priority. Public water infrastructure financing should be prioritized by the establishment of growth areas which would be consistent and supported by updated county comprehensive plans. The growth areas would be proximal to existing urban areas with infrastructure in need of upgrading.

Public financing should not be distributed to water and sewer purveyors that wear two hats as public entities and for-profit enterprises. Once water companies become focused on selling a commodity (water) for profit, they lose sight of the need to protect and serve the public health, safety and welfare.

Legislative and Regulatory Issues:

- What are the statutory and regulatory barriers to enhancing our infrastructure improvement efforts within the Commonwealth while still protecting public health and the environment?

There is currently no coordination of public water and sewer planning. It is not mandatory for public sewer to be consistent with updated comprehensive plans. Currently, a sewer planning module can be granted approval with a simple letter stating that public water can be provided even if such public water lines are miles away or the water comes from another watershed.

Public water purveyors are not required to include home municipalities in the decision to provide water service to speculative developers. Municipalities have no right or power to stop or control the construction of water infrastructure within their borders.

- Through the legislative or regulatory process, what can be done to encourage greater local investment in infrastructure and eliminate or lessen the cost of providing infrastructure improvements?

Presently infrastructure construction is driven by the economic policy of the Commonwealth and by speculative developers wishing to maximize the financial return on a piece of property. Legislators must put the health, safety and welfare of the citizens of Pennsylvania before the need of investors to realize an exorbitant financial return on a short term investment. Tax payers and rate payers are the source of local funding. Most Pennsylvania municipalities are not equipped financially to take over infrastructure constructed by private speculative investment

The prevailing policy that infrastructure will reach every property in the state must be abandoned. A sustainable infrastructure policy will prioritize funding to existing urban areas for maintenance and upgrading. Outside of those areas, protection of water resources must be rigidly enforced to ensure water quality and quantity for the future.

Surface and groundwater resources must be protected from pollution and excessive withdrawal. Presently, state policy considers water supply to be unlimited. That policy encourages irresponsible use and misuse of an irreplaceable natural resource. The protection of water resources must become a top priority with regards to funding, policy and regulation. Giving

local officials the power to control unnecessary extensions of infrastructure into their municipalities will reduce the need to maintain that infrastructure in the future. If our water resources are compromised, no amount of investment will repair them.

General:

- Aside from the issues identified above, are there other issues are you facing that you think the Task Force should consider?

A truly sustainable water policy will prioritize the protection of precious water resources. It will be less expensive to purchase development rights on land or purchase outright, than attempt to treat fouled water supplies in the future.

- What recommendations do you have for the Task Force to address these issues?

Encourage legislation that corrects the mistakes of the past. Discontinue the economic policy that encourages extension of infrastructure by developers into undeveloped areas. Require water companies to develop long-term investment plans for the maintenance of infrastructure. Establish Growth Areas that will confine infrastructure to compact, cost efficient land use patterns. Give municipalities the right to enter into the conversations that are presently limited to water companies and developers.

Thank you,

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