



Town of North Reading Municipal Wastewater System FAQs - Fall 2023

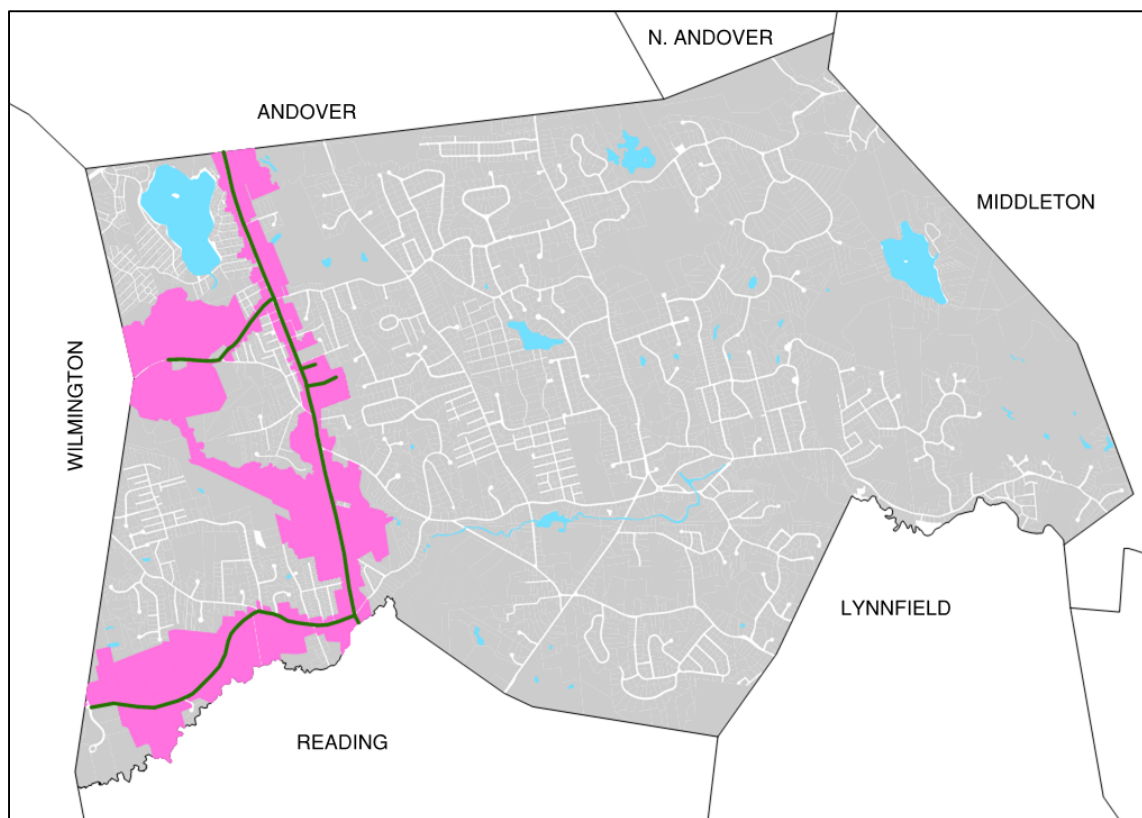
Why is the Town being Sewered?

The Town is seeking to promote economic growth similar to sewered communities in the surrounding Towns. Septic systems have limited the type and amount of growth in the Town due to their design and capacity constraints. A property valuation and new growth study was conducted to evaluate the potential commercial and residential growth in the community related to the addition of sewers. The report was highly favorable and will be made available to the public.

A centralized wastewater treatment system also promotes public health and environmental protection. Compared to septic systems, municipal sewers improve surface and ground water quality, reduce odors, and allow for wastewater to be treated to state and federal standards.

What is the proposed sewer route?

The proposed Phase I in-town sewer route is shown in green below. Parcels highlighted in pink will have access to the sewer line.





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How will the project be funded?

The project cost is anticipated to be funded through a Debt Exclusion with a debt repayment schedule over a 30 year payback period. The tax impact to the average single family home valued at \$749,319 has been most recently calculated to be, on average, \$1,116 per year over the 30 payback period with the anticipated award of an SRF low interest loan that would reduce borrowing costs with a below market interest rate for borrowed construction funds. Beyond SRF, the Town is investigating additional grants, loans, and partnership opportunities to further fund project costs and lower the tax impacts due to the Debt Exclusion.

Are there fees to be paid by the property owner when connecting to the new sewer system?

State Law allows the Town to assess a fee (beyond the debt exclusion) to property owners who choose to connect to the sewer system. Like the currently charged System Development Fee for new connections to the water system, this fee would only be charged when a property owner chooses to connect to the new system. The current recommendation to determine the total Sewer System Development Fee to be paid by the property owner is based on the total number of residential bedroom existing in a residential property and the equivalent number of residential bedrooms in commercial properties Title 5 equivalent wastewater flow per bedroom of 110 gal per bedroom per day. The fee per bedroom may be discounted to promote more immediate connections to the new sewer system in order to increase the number of users of the system upon its completion. The Select Board is no longer considering the use of betterments, which are charged to property owners along the route regardless of whether they choose to connect, for this project but they are considering establishing a System Development Fee for new connections to the Municipal Wastewater System.

Once sewer service is connected, property owners will be charged a sewer user fee, based on their water usage. If the property has irrigation, a property owner can install a deduct meter which will enable the property owner to realize a savings on their sewer user fee for water that does not enter the sanitary sewage system. Sewer user fees will be reviewed annually by the Select Board. The user fees support the annual cost of running the wastewater system.



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What happens to the Sewer System Development Fees paid by the property owners who connect to the sewer system?

The Sewer System Development Fees, like that of the Water System Development Fees, can be reserved in a segregated account to fund the operations and maintenance of the utility or can be used to pay for sewer related debt service.

Do I have a choice whether or not to connect to the new Municipal Wastewater System?

Yes, property owners in the sewer service area will have a choice whether or not to connect to the new Municipal Wastewater System unless their current septic system is deemed to be in failure and the Board of Health determines that a connection to the available Municipal Wastewater System is required.

What happens to my septic system when I do connect to the new sewer service?

The de-commissioning and/or removal or filling of septic systems will be determined on a property-by-property basis. Any component that is not essential to the connection to the public sewer will have to be properly abandoned, the methods for which are based on the type of septic component. This determination is made by the property's engineer at the time the property is being connected to the sewer system.

In addition to the Debt Exclusion Tax Impact and the Sewer System Development Fee, how much will it cost a property owner to physically connect their property to the Sewer?

The property owner's cost to connect to the sewer will vary significantly as it will depend on numerous factors. Some of those include the distance between the house waste line and the sewer service stub at the property line, depth of the sewer service, relative elevation of the house waste line



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compared to the Town sewer, groundwater elevation, presence of ledge/boulders, offsets from underground utilities, landscaping impacts, and other restoration costs. The property owner is responsible for all connection costs. Contracts between the property owner and the engineer and contractor are private. The property owner should consider budgeting for the following services and fees associated with connection in addition to annual user charges and sewer system development fees:

- Engineering including plans, specifications, and permit application (on the order of \$2,000 - \$10,000)
- Construction including all costs to connect the house waste line to the sewer service stub, decommissioning the existing sewage disposal system, and restoration of property (on the order of \$10,000 - \$20,000).

The Town recommends that homeowners obtain several proposals for their connection from professional engineers and Town-approved drain-layers. Property owners may also choose to join with their neighbors to solicit proposals from Town-approved drain layers to perform multiple connection installations which may result in more favorable pricing.

What do property owners need to design in order to connect to the new sewer system?

The property owner is responsible for all sewer lateral work from the public sewer connection point located at the property line to their structure and any internal work within the structure that may be required to connect to the sewer lateral being installed by the property owner to connect to the public sewer connection point.

The Town recommends that homeowners obtain several proposals from professional engineers for the design of this work.

When do I connect to the sewer system?

Property owners determine when they desire to connect to the sewer system unless the Board of Health gives notice to the property owner to connect to the sewer in the street due to a failed septic system. If this is the case, the Town strongly encourages property owners to work with an engineer to develop their connection plan and submit a Connection Permit Application to



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the Town, as well as speak with some Town-approved, licensed contractors (drain-layers) about doing the installation.

Is there any payment assistance or abatement of the connection costs?

- State Income Tax Credit – A tax credit of up to \$15,000 of your sewer hook-up costs may be claimed on your MA income tax return. You must file Schedule SC and Schedule CMS with your annual return. Talk to your tax advisor or contact the Mass Dept. of Revenue Tax Department at 617-887-6367 for details and information.
- Financial assistance opportunities can also be found on the State's website at <https://www.mass.gov/guides/title-5septic-systems-financial-assistance-opportunities-for-system-owners>

Can I add more bedrooms on to my residential property or expand the use of my commercial property beyond the limits of my current septic system once my property is connected to sewer?

Yes. A property connected to sewer can apply to the Department of Public Works for increased sewage flow and pay the additional Sewer System Development Fee for the increased number of bedrooms or equivalent bedrooms for commercial properties added to the property. The property will still need to comply with all local zoning bylaws including yard setbacks, height, and lot coverage.

What if I am not on the proposed sewer route but want to connect?

Future connections may be made available outside of the proposed Phase I Project Area. There is additional sewer capacity beyond the Phase I Project Area that would allow the Town to explore expansion options after the initial proposed sewer project is constructed. The Martin's Pond area is currently considered an area that would benefit from sewer expansion as a Phase II Project Area. Other areas in close proximity of the existing sewer system may be considered for additional expansion provided sewer capacity for expansion exists beyond what has been reserved for connections & new growth opportunities within the Phase I Project Area and the expansion into the Phase II Martin's Pond Area if expansion plans into this area remain viable.



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In addition, properties that do not directly front the new sewer system but have a way to connect to the system by other means such as an easement through property that do front the sewer system may be allowed to connect by application to the Department of Public Works for a sewer connection permit, providing documentation of a legal easement and payment of the applicable Sewer System Development Fee, dependent upon available sewer capacity.

What is the time frame for the project construction to start and the completion of the project that would allow for sewer connections?

A special Town Meeting vote for construction funding is anticipated to take place in spring of 2024, and if successful, this will be followed by a special ballot measure. The earliest start of construction would most likely be the spring of 2025, with all construction anticipated to be complete by November of 2028.

Do Sewer systems alleviate flooding?

No, sewer systems are separate from storm drainage systems. This project will not address localized flooding.

If I want to connect to the system, or if my septic fails, what are the options for us? The proposed tax increase would take the \$1,000 a year a household would set aside for septic repairs.

In general, a property owner along the route would be able to connect when they want to, subject to payment of a system development fee in an amount to be determined as is the case for the water system. There may be circumstances where, due to failure of a septic system and an anticipated high cost to reconstruct or replace a septic system, the Board of Health requires a property owner to connect to the system.

Will the town create a fund to help seniors fix their septic systems?

There is a state program through MassHousing that offers low- or no-interest financing to help homeowners address a failing or non-compliant septic system. The Town will make this information available as part of its online information resources to residents.



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What is the plan for HOAs - condo associations that already have a sewerage treatment on property?

In general, a property owner along the route, including HOA's, would be able to connect when they want to, subject to payment of a system development fee in an amount to be determined, as is the case for the water system. If a property is controlled by a condominium association, the decision to connect and the apportionment of the system development fee would have to be made in accordance with that association's bylaws/policies/procedures. An exception to this could be a determination by the Board of Health that a connection to the Municipal Sewer System is deemed necessary to avoid a public health hazard due to a functional failure of a particular property's septic system.

What businesses would come to North Reading as a result of sewer, and how much revenue will this bring in?

The Select Board is seeking to expand commercial activity on Main Street and Concord Street, which may in some instances also include the construction of new housing units. This development could result in up to \$411 million in new tax revenue over 30 years under existing zoning.

Will we go to a commercial/residential tax rate split as a result of this project?

While additional commercial activity makes it more feasible to shift the tax burden from residential properties to commercial properties, this is a decision that is made annually by the Select Board at the tax classification hearing in November. For the current fiscal year (2024), 88% of the tax base in North Reading is residential and 12 % is commercial/industrial/personal property. Both rates are currently the same.

If we get the growth you are projecting, we will need to change the town charter and turn this town into a city.

No, the type of growth that is anticipated is not likely to require a change to the form of government.

Have we come up with new zoning for Route 28? How many floors will the town allow Pulte to build, 4? 5?



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A handful of parcels around but *not* including the Ocean State Job Lot property were rezoned in 2016 to allow multifamily housing. These developments may have up to four floors, consistent with the rest of the Highway Business zoning on Main Street. Pulte's Martins Landing development, located on Lowell Road (Route 62), has five buildings that are four stories tall and another four buildings that are five stories tall (some of these are currently under construction).

We are discussing becoming a “dense community”, but there appears to be no data on the impact on our police and fire departments with this growth.

Among the information being gathered between now and a Town Meeting to consider the project is, to the extent possible, the estimated impact of development on Town services.

I thought Pulte only requested four-floor buildings, but they were given five stories (on Route 62).

Pulte originally was permitted for four floors and sought additional zoning relief to construct buildings of five floors.

Why would homeowners pay \$1,000/year to bring sewer into the town if they can't eventually have the option to connect to it?

The goal of this project is not to sewer the whole town, but rather to expand the commercial tax base, providing greater long-term financial stability to the Town, and to provide additional commercial amenities to residents.

Can we get a list of businesses their owners, who will currently benefit from the sewer? Have they all agreed to tie in? And, has the Town reached out to prospective companies to come to Route 28 in North Reading? Are we pursuing anyone or is it just about building apartment complexes?

The primary intention of this project is commercial development; however, residential properties along the proposed sewer route will also be allowed to connect. Properties along all of Main Street and all of Concord Street, as well as North Street between Main Street and Lowell Road, Park Street between Main Street and Concord Street, and Lowell Road between North Street and the Wilmington line will be able to connect.



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Please update the northreading.gov website with committee member names. That would be appreciated.

The page has been updated.

Despite all the words, no final amount has been acknowledged.

The project's estimated cost is \$129,100,000.00. The estimated cost to the average single family taxpayer with a property valued a \$745,319.00 is \$1,116.00 per year. Put another way, property owners would pay an additional \$1.50 per \$1,000 of valuation per year.

I fear the wastewater sewer project expense to get to Lawrence and to serve a very small segment of our community is just too high. Anyone I speak to in town and outside are stunned by the amount of money that is being cast onto a small segment of North Reading. What happens to a business person who owns two business condos and a condo in town, all of which are abutting properties?

Betterment Assessments to those properties abutting the proposed sewer route is no longer being considered for this project. The cost of the project would be determined the same way for every property in town regardless of location, in the amount of \$1.50 per \$1,000 of valuation. So if your home is worth \$500,000, the cost to you is \$750 per year. If you live along the route and choose to connect to the sewer, you would need to pay the system development fee at the time of connection.

Will we ever have some kind of rendering of Route 28?

Commercial development in Reading to our South and Andover to our north have been referred to as examples of the type of development sewer could support. The Community Planning Commission has also developed renderings of potential development at the Ocean State Job Lot property (subject to rezoning), available here:

<https://www.northreadingma.gov/community-planning/files/main-streetwinter-street-conceptual-redevelopment-plan>.

For more information, please visit:

<https://www.northreadingma.gov/updated-wastewater-sewer-information>



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What would the impact be to the Municipal Wastewater System Project costs if the entire project was delayed until after the expiration of the MassDOT imposed moratorium on issuing road opening permits within the planned improvements section of Route 114, which is estimated to be 2034.

Our engineer's opinion of probable construction costs for 30% design is currently at \$129,100,000 for completing the project in 2028. By delaying the project until 2034, the engineer's opinion of probable construction costs for 30% design increases by approximately \$43 Million to a total project cost of \$172,000,000.

How will the development made possible by having a Municipal Wastewater System affect the flood plain?

While development on a parcel along the sewer route, in other areas of town, or even out of town may impact the flood plain over time, there are state laws and building codes as well as local bylaws in place to help mitigate the impacts of development in and near the flood plains.