



**SPRINGFIELD WATER AND SEWER COMMISSION
P.O. BOX 995, SPRINGFIELD, MA 01101**

Date of Issuance: October 5, 2017

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Springfield Water and Sewer Commission Hosts State Legislative Delegation
Members to Discuss Regional Water Sector Challenges**
MassDEP Commissioner Suuberg Also Presents Case for NPDES Delegation

The Springfield Water and Sewer Commission (SWSC), along with top leadership from the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP), hosted members of the Springfield region's state legislative delegation for the first time on Monday to discuss challenges facing the regional water and wastewater system. Impending issues related to an aging workforce and infrastructure; state vs. federal permitting authority; and funding to meet new environmental regulations were central points of the meeting, which was held in the c. 1974 wastewater treatment facility on Bondi's Island in Agawam.

Rep. Brian Ashe, Rep. Angelo Puppolo, Rep. Jose Tosado, Rep. Nicholas Boldyga, and staff of Sen. Jim Welch were in attendance. SWSC Chairwoman Vanessa Otero and Executive Director Joshua Schimmel emphasized the importance of establishing a working relationship with elected officials at a time when there are expanding environmental, regulatory, health and safety, and financial challenges facing the water and wastewater sector. Otero noted in particular that much of the Commission's workforce was nearing retirement age. After a large national effort in the 1970s to train and recruit workers for jobs in the water sector was not followed up in subsequent decades, the Commission finds itself challenged to fill upcoming retirements. The Commission is currently working with Springfield Technical Community College to revive a training and certification program for new water and wastewater operators. "Once again it is time to focus on



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training the next generation,” Otero said, asking lawmakers to find ways to partner with the Commission to cultivate workers for jobs that offer “good pay, security, and a fulfilling career.”

The age of Springfield’s infrastructure was also a prominent focus of discussion. Recalling recent trips to the White House to participate in infrastructure planning summits, Schimmel noted that transportation issues dominated national-level conversations, despite a \$3.5 trillion need to update water and wastewater infrastructure in the country, and a \$2.4 billion need in Massachusetts alone. Of the Commission’s approximately 1,000 miles of water, sewer, and transmission pipe, 44% is over 75 years old. “This is not a partisan issue,” Schimmel said. “The simple fact is that much of Springfield’s water infrastructure is a century old, and not addressing that soon will have major implications on the region’s economy going forward. Even more so than transportation, without reliable water and wastewater service, there is no development.” Schimmel requested that lawmakers consider providing more water infrastructure funding in Massachusetts.

Increasing environmental regulations stand to compete for funds that are needed to upgrade infrastructure, with federal regulations often not factoring in local environmental or economic conditions. MassDEP Commissioner Martin Suuberg spoke about pending legislation to assume control of the federal National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) program, which directs much water and wastewater treatment facility operations. Currently, Massachusetts is one of only four remaining states where the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administers the NPDES program. Gov. Charlie Baker introduced legislation in the spring (H.B. 2777) to allow MassDEP to apply for NPDES delegation. “MassDEP is confident in its ability to administer this important water quality program,” said Commissioner Suuberg. “Administering this program will help ensure that the Commonwealth and its communities are taking a big-picture approach to directing resources towards the greatest water quality improvement, and working effectively with cities, towns and other stakeholders.”

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