

Conversion to Municipal Sewer

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Issue

This report answers several general questions about the processes and costs for converting a large-scale septic system to municipal sewer access. The questions and answers follow.

What Costs are Associated With Large-Scale Septic Conversions to Municipal Sewer Access?

According to the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), the costs of installing a sewer system depend on several factors, such as:

1. the length of pipe needed to collect and transport the wastewater from the source to the nearest connection point;
2. an increase in operation and maintenance costs for a treatment plant that accepts new flows and must manage a larger sewer service area; and
3. if the treatment plant receiving flow is located in another municipality, fees to the receiving municipality (plus the costs associated with negotiating and executing intermunicipal agreements that are necessary for the sewer connection).

DEEP notes that the installation of new sewer pipe can cost from several hundred dollars up to approximately \$1 million per linear foot, or per mile of sewer extension. The costs increase depending on such things as the type of sewer system required for the topography involved (e.g., non-gravity systems may be more expensive) and the presence of bedrock, sensitive receptors (i.e., land uses that are more likely to be used by certain population groups), and “obstacles” along the sewer alignment (e.g., wetlands or railroad or bridge crossings).

Are There Programs to Fund These Conversions?

DEEP administers the state Clean Water Fund (CWF), which can be used to fund the installation of municipal sanitary sewers if the installation is documented to be the most cost effective and technically viable alternative to remedy a community pollution problem related to failing or substandard septic systems. The CWF finances projects in the public right of way, but would not fund installations on private property or ongoing costs of operation and maintenance (i.e., post construction).

In order to determine if a community pollution problem exists or can be reasonably expected in the future ([CGS § 22a-428](#)), DEEP evaluates documentation available with the local health department on the condition of the septic systems. If a sewer extension is proposed for economic development purposes, [U.S. Department of Agricultural \(Rural Development\)](#) or the Office of Policy and Management's [Small Town Economic Assistance Program](#) (STEAP) grants can be other sources of funding for sewer extensions.

In addition to the above programs, Connecticut law allows municipalities (i.e., through a water pollution control authority) to charge for sewer line extensions ([CGS § 7-249](#)). Specifically, it allows for assessments on properties that benefit from new sewer lines to pay for their construction and related costs. To determine the benefit and assessment, a municipality may consider things such as the property's size, frontage, assessed value, and current or permitted use. Under [CGS § 7-249a](#), a municipality that builds a sewer system with federal assistance may instead, or also, assess industrial users of the system in proportion to the costs these users impose on it. For more information about the financing of sewer line extensions in this manner, see OLR report [2010-R-0317](#).

Are There State Regulatory Processes That Apply to the Conversion Process?

Yes. According to DEEP, these conversion projects must be consistent with the requirements of CWF regulations ([Conn. Agencies Regs. § 22a-482-1 et seq.](#)). State-funded sewer extensions may also need an Environmental Impact Evaluation (EIE) developed as required under the Connecticut Environmental Policy Act (CEPA) ([CGS § 22a-1 to -1h](#)). (Additional information about CEPA, including the required components of an EIE, is on available DEEP's website, [here](#).)

In terms of technical standards, DEEP reported that the plans and specifications for any sewer extension project must meet the guidance contained in the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission's [Technical Report No. 16](#). Also, depending on project footprint size and

location (coastal versus inland), sewer extensions may need a flood management certification, a structures dredging and fill permit, an inland wetlands permit, and a building permit from local authorities.

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