

## **Preface to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) about the Mashpee Sewer Project**

The Mashpee Sewer Commission here offers answers to questions most frequently asked by the Town's residents regarding the town's sewer project. The more **General FAQs** are addressed first (page 1), followed by those that are **Property Connection Related** (page 2), **Schedule Related** (page 4), and **Funding Related** (page 5). All answers are based on current knowledge as of January 2023.

This list of FAQs will be updated periodically. Mashpee property owners are encouraged to submit their written questions for consideration via: <https://www.mashpeema.gov/user/4043/contact>

### **General FAQs**

#### ***1) Why is the Town of Mashpee building a sewer system?***

Federal, State, and County regulations require municipalities to control the pollution of their water resources to not only ensure human health but to support the long-term economic well-being of our communities. The water quality in Mashpee, and across Cape Cod, has degraded with the increase in population and development over the past 50 years. While property owners have long managed wastewater with cesspools and septic systems, Mashpee's growth has significantly increased nutrient contamination of soil, groundwater, local ponds, rivers, estuaries, and bays. Existing private septic systems are unable to sufficiently clean wastewater to levels that prevent the hazardous pollution of our community's water resources. For additional information see the Mashpee Clean Water Plan at [www.Mashpeema.gov](http://www.Mashpeema.gov)

#### ***2) What is the Mashpee Clean Water Plan and what are its goals?***

The goals of the Mashpee Clean Water Plan are to achieve clean water through the 1) reduction of nutrient loading (nitrogen and phosphorus) from septic/cesspool seepage; 2) enhance stormwater management, 3) restore the quality of aquatic habitats for shellfish and other aquatic wildlife, 4) safe recreational use of water bodies, and 5) healthy ecosystems.

#### ***3) What is the goal for the sewer system?***

The goal is to reduce the amount of contaminants, primarily nitrogen and phosphorus flowing into Mashpee's water resources to reduce pollution. As the treatment system becomes operational, periodic evaluation and updates will be provided as to the progress of improving water quality, and directions for expanding the sewer system.

#### ***4) What is Mashpee's plan for the sewer construction?***

The sewer commission was established in 1987 with the recognition of degraded water resources in Mashpee. Solutions proposed at that time included a shellfish propagation program to control nutrient pollution. However, the Town's water resources have degraded to the point that shellfish production alone cannot effectively achieve water quality requirements. The formal plan for improving water quality in Mashpee was approved by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) Agency under the Massachusetts Estuary Project (MEP) in 2015 and partially funded by unanimous town meeting vote in 2021.

The five-phase plan still includes a shellfish propagation component, but the construction of a wastewater collection system along with a new Water Resource Recovery Facility (WRRF) serving Mashpee neighborhoods has been determined essential to meet water quality goals. The groundbreaking for the WRRF occurred December 8, 2022, after which construction of lateral lines to connect properties north and south of Route 28 ensued. As construction proceeds, schedule updates will be available at: [Sewer Project Information | Town of Mashpee MA](#)

***5) Where is the WRRF being constructed?***

The WRRF is being constructed on a cleared site within a wooded multi-acre lot next to Mashpee's Transfer Station. Vehicle access will be from Carlton Drive, near Asher's Path East. A wooded buffer zone will be maintained to around the facility to help shield it from general public view.

***6) Will the whole town have to be sewered?***

No, however the goal of the Town's sewer system would be to achieve at least 75% reduction of the Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL), into Mashpee's fresh and tidal water resources. Greater efficiencies will be achieved by the Town as more properties become serviced by the sewer system.

***7) Will my house be connected to the sewer system?***

Within the next twenty years it is hoped that the majority of homes in Mashpee will be connected to the sewer system. This phased project approach will be continuously expanded until the septic pollution in our waterways is demonstrably reduced to acceptable levels.

***8) What will happen to those properties that cannot be sewered?***

The plan is to connect as many properties as possible to the municipal sewer system. However, town-wide property hookups may not be completely possible because of geography, geology, or other limitations. Properties in non-sewered areas do not fall under the Sewer Commission's purview, but rather lie with the Select Board and Board of Health. It is possible that the Town could require replacement of the Title V system with Innovative/Alternative systems.

**Property Connection Related FAQs**

***9) What is expected of me as a homeowner?***

Once the Town's sewer main is installed along your street, your property must be connected to the sewer system for wastewater treatment in a timely manner. It is the owner's responsibility to install the home's sewer service lateral line for property connection to the main sewer line "stub" installed along the street curb with a green stake. Once the sewer service is functional the homeowner is also responsible for the proper abandonment of any existing septic system on their property in accordance with applicable regulations.

***10) What happens to my septic tank after I connect to the Mashpee Sewer System?***

Once your home is connected to the Town's sewer, the existing septic system must be formally abandoned in accordance with requirements of the Town of Mashpee Health Department. Typically, the contractor will

abandon a septic tank by pumping it empty, punching a hole in the tank's floor and filling it with sand (or other material acceptable to the Health Department). Block cesspools and leaching chambers pits made of any material can be pumped dry and filled with sand. Leaching chambers made of concrete or plastic with an overall height of less than two feet and simple pipe and stone components, such as beds, fields or trenches, can be abandoned in place with no destruction or filling required.

**11) Will the Town of Mashpee help homeowners choose contractors to connect house to the sewer lines?**

The Town's assistance is limited by law to providing a list of qualified licensed contractors for property owners to choose from. The list is maintained and published by the Town's Health Department at its website:

<https://www.mashpeeema.gov/board-health>

**12) How is the sewer connection contractor selected by a property owner, and in what time frame?**

Mashpee's Board of Health maintains a contractor list for Licensed Utility Installers on its website:

<https://www.mashpeeema.gov/board-health>. Property owners should consider evaluating the relevant experience/qualifications of contractors along with their estimated sewer connection costs prior to selection. Connection costs will largely depend on the actual site conditions of each property, particularly the home's distance from the sewer service connection point. In cases where the home's lower elevation requires a pump to lift waste to the street's sewer main, the Town will provide the pump for installation.

Property owners will be notified by the Town when the municipal system is ready to accept wastewater service. Per Sewer Regulations, owners will have ninety (90) days from receipt of this notification to complete the installation of its sewer connection. Once the sewer system is properly servicing a home, the owner's contractor should complete and report proper abandonment of the septic system to the Mashpee Board of Health.

**13) How do I find a reputable contractor to connect my home to the Town's sewer system?**

See FAQ # 12. Reputable contractors should be able to demonstrate their qualifications and experience to perform the work that homeowners require for sewer connection and proper septic system abandonment. They may also offer websites for homeowners to review. For further assistance call the Mashpee Board of Health at 508-539-1426.

**14) What basic information should I be prepared to provide on an initial call to a licensed contractor?**

The initial contact with a contractor should be for the purpose of getting a quote to a) install a sewer service lateral from the building to the street property line where the Town's connection stub will be located with a green stake, and to b) properly abandon the existing septic system. When asked to provide a quote, most contractors won't charge for it.

**15) What basic questions should I be prepared to ask a licensed contractor to compare their qualifications, experience, cost, schedule, and reliability to complete the connection of my house to the sewer main?**

Reputable contractors can usually provide a Qualifications/Experience document and may have a website for public review. For scheduling, the owner should advise them that the connection timeframe will likely be

around Spring/Summer/Fall of 2024 for Phase 1 neighborhoods. Reliability is a good question because you don't want a contractor who can't meet the timeline for connection (if they are over-booked). As for cost, owners may wish to consider organizing with neighbors to obtain a combined quote, which could prove more cost-effective for the group.

**16) How will we know that the project is successful and by when? What evaluation measures will be used?**

While most residential septic systems actively release nutrients (primarily nitrogen and phosphorus) into our water resources, any rate to measure the success from Mashpee's sewer project will be elusive or slow. Even after a septic system is abandoned, the nutrients previously released into surrounding soils will continue to leach into our water resources. Nonetheless, regular measurements of nutrient pollutant levels in local waters will continue to be collected by state and local authorities for public reporting. Additional indicators (including oxygen and bacteria levels) will be measured to understand rates of change to water quality that have most seriously impacted the local shellfish and other aquatic wildlife habitats.

**Schedule Related FAQs**

**17) When will my house be connected to the sewer?**

Federal and state funds for sewer infrastructure construction will be released over several years to support the planning, engineering, and construction following a public review and approval process for each phase of the project. Phase I necessarily focuses on construction of the WRRF and those adjacent neighborhoods known to contribute high concentrations of pollutants to sensitive waterbodies. Periodic water quality data reviews and additional data are expected to help determine which neighborhoods should be targeted for subsequent construction phases to achieve pollutant reduction most efficiently.

**18) What is the timetable of the Mashpee sewer construction?**

The Town has anticipated up to five project phases to achieve water quality goals. Each phase will require periodic reviews, as presented below:

Phase 1 – Upper Mashpee River watershed areas 2023/2024

Phase 2 – Pending water resource quality review for 2023/2024 decision making

Phases 3-5 – Pending updated water resource quality reviews

**19) Which houses/streets will be affected first?**

Streets for Phase 1 have been scheduled - see the sewer map

[https://www.mashpee.ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif3426/f/uploads/project\\_map\\_12.13.22.pdf](https://www.mashpee.ma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif3426/f/uploads/project_map_12.13.22.pdf)

Streets for phase 2 will be identified in 2023-2024.

**20) What do the first and subsequent homeowners have to do?**

After street mains have been installed and sewer service connection points (identified by green stakes) established for each property, homeowners should be ready to select their sewer connection contractor.

**21) What is the construction plan by street and by house?**

Streets for Phase 1 are listed on the Town's website:

[https://www.mashpeeema.gov/sites/g/files/vyhli3426/f/uploads/project\\_map\\_12.13.22.pdf](https://www.mashpeeema.gov/sites/g/files/vyhli3426/f/uploads/project_map_12.13.22.pdf)

Properties will have their sewer service connection point identified by the Town's contractor with a green stake.

**22) Flag/marker placement. What does this mean? What is the homeowner response & timetable?**

A green stake will be placed by the Town's contractor at the estimated connection point between the residence and the street's sewer main. The property owner's contractor will confirm the sewer connection point. For more information see:

[https://www.mashpeeema.gov/sites/g/files/vyhli3426/f/uploads/the\\_green\\_stake\\_on\\_the\\_lawn\\_ver.2\\_11-22-22.pdf](https://www.mashpeeema.gov/sites/g/files/vyhli3426/f/uploads/the_green_stake_on_the_lawn_ver.2_11-22-22.pdf)

**23) Who will enforce the sewer system hook up schedule, and in what time frame?**

The Town of Mashpee will enforce a reasonable timeframe for property hook up to its sewer system. The connections will not be required for any homes included in Phase 1 construction until 2024, when the WRRF is scheduled to start operations with sewer treatment service to these Phase 1 properties.

**24) What part of the town is next on the schedule?**

Phase 2 is currently being defined following a resource review, with costs determined, and a schedule proposed for resident review at a Town meeting in 2024.

**25) When do the town residents vote on the next sewer phases?**

Each new Phase of the Town's sewer system will be evaluated for resident consideration of the proposed work at Town meetings that are most likely to be scheduled in 2024 and subsequent years.

**Funding Related FAQs**

**26) What is this going to cost me as a homeowner?**

At this time, it would be misleading to estimate the sewer connection cost for Mashpee homeowners given the project's phased schedule for completion over the next twenty years. However, several factors can be expected to affect the costs of any homeowner, primarily the home's size and distance from the street, and may involve cost adjustments for unique connections, exceptional landscaping, paved areas and the proper abandonment of septic systems. Generally, the cost for smaller lots will tend to be less than for larger lots.

**27) What funding programs are available to assist property owners with paying for the sewer connection?**

Funding a home's sewer connection and septic tank abandonment is the responsibility of the individual property owner in Mashpee. However, the connections will not be required for homes until the wastewater collection and treatment system are sufficiently complete and operational, which is projected to be during 2024.

In addition to personal, county, and town loan programs, there is a 40 percent State tax credit available that could offset the cost up to \$6,000. Both the county and town programs allow long term payment options. Homeowners are encouraged to consider using the Barnstable County Community Septic Management Loan Program (CSMLP), which is available for homeowners in Cape Cod communities to help finance their property's connection to new sewer systems (including septic system abandonment). See the link below for further information on the SMLP:

[www.capecod.gov/departments/health-environment/programs-services/water-and-wastewater/community-septic-management-loan-program-csmlp/](http://www.capecod.gov/departments/health-environment/programs-services/water-and-wastewater/community-septic-management-loan-program-csmlp/).

**28) How and when will property owners know the annual cost to use the Mashpee sewer system?**

While the sewer rate is yet to be determined, it will be based on usage by individual property owners. The Town anticipates the rate to be established in 2023.

**29) Will the residents be given a cost per phase?**

Yes, the Town's public expenses for proposed projects are subject to resident review through the public meeting process.

**30) What funding is available to the homeowner, and when does payment occur to whom and how?**

The payment of any contractor for a home sewer system connection followed by abandonment of any septic system is the responsibility of each property owner. Private, State, County, and Town loans are available for property owners to consider (see FAQ's # 12 & #27).

**31) How should commercial property owners with Title 5-compliant septic tanks become prepared for connection to the Town's sewer system, and how will connection costs be determined?**

All properties within a sewer service area are required to connect. Commercial properties with buildings currently serviced by Title 5 septic systems should plan to connect to the Town's sewer system. Commercial property owners with functioning septic systems can monitor the phased planning and construction of the Town's sewer system to know approximately when the street's sewer main will be installed with connection stub identified for the property. These owners can contact their licensed contractor to obtain an estimate and completion schedule for 1) installation and connection of the building's lateral line to the Town's connection stub at the street curb, and 2) once sewer service is functioning, to properly abandon the existing septic system.