



**CITY OF BURLINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
WATER RESOURCES DIVISION**

234 Penny Lane
Post Office Box 878
Burlington, VT 05402-0878
802.863-4501 VOX
802.864-8233 FAX
802.863.0450 TTY
www.burlingtonvt.gov/DPW

Chapin Spencer
DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS

Megan J. Moir
MANAGER – BURLINGTON STORMWATER PROGRAM

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Contact: Megan Moir
802-734-4595(cell)
mmoir@burlingtonvt.gov

City of Burlington Launches Public Survey on Water Quality Improvement Plan

Water Resources Team to Seek Public Input on Water Priorities through Online Survey

Burlington, VT – As part of its ongoing effort to seek input on water quality priorities, the City of Burlington is launching an online survey to gauge public views on wastewater treatment and stormwater runoff issues. The survey, which is posted at http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/IntegratedWQPlan_Survey, will be available online until August 25.

Input will be used to help inform Burlington's plan to improve water quality through a new, integrated planning approach for wastewater and stormwater management. Earlier this summer, staff from the City's Water Resource Division have been attending Neighborhood Planning Assemblies (NPAs) and various City Boards and Commissions to share information about the Integrated Planning framework and our water resource challenges in an effort to provide citizens with baseline information. These events have provided opportunities for beginning the conversation about how Burlingtonians would like to see their stormwater and wastewater utility fees spent in the fight for improved water quality. Copies of the presentation and recordings of several of the outreach events are available at: http://www.burlingtonvt.gov/DPW/IntegratedWQPlan_Schedule.

"We're starting to get an understanding of what people think is important regarding water quality in Burlington," said Laurie Adams, Department of Public Works (DPW) Assistant Director for Water Quality. "We want to make sure we give everyone an opportunity to weigh in. After the survey, we'll hold another round of meetings with stakeholders from public and private sector organizations, including non-governmental groups, the business sector, educational institutions, and public agencies to review the information gathered in the survey. This is the time for people to identify their priorities for wastewater and stormwater management."

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This public outreach effort is part of a larger effort supported by a technical assistance grant from the US Environmental Protection Agency. Burlington was one of 5 communities across the U.S. which received the grant. The \$67,000 grant provides consulting services to the City by Tetra Tech, an EPA contracted environmental consulting firm that has assisted with previous State of Vermont Lake Champlain phosphorous studies. Tetra Tech is working with City staff to develop methods for evaluating new stormwater and wastewater projects by identifying and refining criteria used by the City to judge the merits of new project proposals. Examples of review criteria include: determining the cost per pound of pollutant removed or treated; and evaluating the side benefits to a project, such as provision of additional green space, reduced greenhouse gases, flood abatement, or improved neighborhood aesthetics.

In years past, the City has devoted considerable resources to treating wastewater from three sewage plants and implementing a variety of stormwater pollution reduction measures. With much additional effort needed to improve water quality, members of the Water Resource Division are working to ensure the most effective targeting of water quality improvement projects with limited environmental programs funds to maximize benefits to the lake and its tributaries.

As part of this targeting effort, the public is invited to weigh in on proposed projects and the project evaluation criteria. A webinar and a series of community outreach and input sessions with NPAs, nonprofit organizations, public agencies, and other interested parties was launched in June. Other outreach events are scheduled throughout the remainder of the year. Results from the public input process will be reviewed and further refined by the Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation and regional EPA officials, and eventually will be used by DPW staff charged with managing Burlington's wastewater and stormwater infrastructure.

"We invite our community members to log on to the survey and let us know what they believe are the most important considerations in spending money on water quality projects," said Megan Moir, DPW Stormwater Program Manager. "We look forward to reviewing the results and getting a better perspective on where we are – and where we want to go."

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