

Water Infrastructure Listening Sessions Summary

The Governor's Office, Minnesota Department of Health, Minnesota Pollution Control Agency and Minnesota Public Facilities Authority hosted listening sessions around the state to hear concerns from Minnesota communities about the water and wastewater infrastructure. This is a summary of what they heard:

Funding

- Without more funding assistance, increases in water and wastewater bills could easily outpace resident's ability to pay, especially in communities with significant numbers of low- or fixed-income residents.
- Many communities can't afford improvements to meet anticipated regulatory changes without more grant funds.
- Maintaining and replacing aging infrastructure combined with stricter regulations present huge challenges for rural cities with small tax and customer bases.
- Cost differences in water and wastewater rates can place border towns at an economic disadvantage with neighboring states.
- The costs to treat drinking water and wastewater can vary throughout the state. Certain regions of the state have more difficult drinking water to treat. These regions also tend to be in area where wastewater regulations may be more stringent due to the quality of the receiving water.

Regulations

- State agencies should coordinate regulatory changes and think comprehensively so that impacts do not conflict or compete with other regulations.
- Effluent standards can be difficult to meet and involve tradeoffs; chemicals used to meet standards can harm equipment and degrade receiving waters.
- Timing of improvements needs to be coordinated with street repairs, changes in regulations, and fund availability.
- Non-point sources of nutrients need to be addressed as well.
- Clear standards are needed for water reuse.

Sustainability

- Asset management is essential, but many systems lack resources/expertise.
- As plant complexity increases, employing and retaining qualified operators is growing more difficult.
- Increasing costs could drive industries to move.
- Declining water quality means a declining economy.
- Drinking water, wastewater, and stormwater management should be integrated and coordinated across agencies and local government.