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30 More Days for a Generational CSO Decision

More time gives communities a closer look at what the next generation of CSO control could deliver — and require

CHELSEA, MA — More than \$1 billion has already been invested in the region's first generation of combined sewer overflow cleanup. The Draft Updated CSO Control Plan proposes approximately \$1.3 billion more — with higher levels of control potentially requiring substantially larger projects, greater disruption, and still greater long-term costs.

With those choices poised to shape the region's waterways, communities, and rates for decades, the MWRA Advisory Board welcomes the extension of the public comment deadline through October 30, 2026.

"Sewage does not belong in healthy waterways, and we have always been committed to finishing this job," said Andrew M. Pappastergion, Vice-Chair of the MWRA Board of Directors, now in his 30th year on the Board. "I was there for the original CSO Long-Term Control Plan. We knew there would be more work to do, and there still is. But after decades of progress, the question is what finishing the job responsibly looks like now. Before we ask another generation to live with the construction and pay the bills, we should be clear about what the next level of investment will actually deliver."

The April 30 Draft Plan does not merely hold the line on the progress already made. It builds on that progress with a first-in-the-nation, future-looking approach based on projected 2050 climate conditions and proposes major new infrastructure to eliminate CSO discharges in a typical year under those conditions. The debate now is how much further to go — including whether the region should move beyond that future-focused plan and build substantially larger infrastructure designed for more extreme storm conditions, with the additional cost, construction, traffic, open-space, neighborhood, and long-term ratepayer impacts that could follow.





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There will always be a more extreme storm against which additional infrastructure could be built. The real question is how far the region should go in preparing responsibly for the future. For the Advisory Board, that is what the additional month should help communities examine: What additional environmental and public value comes from the next level of control — and is that value worth what communities would be asked to pay, give up, and go through to achieve it?

The Charles River Watershed Association and Mystic River Watershed Association requested the additional 30 days, with Save the Alewife Brook also expressing support. The Advisory Board believes that request was reasonable given the scale and consequences of the decisions now under review. MassDEP similarly cited the Draft Plan's length, complexity, and importance in concluding that the public should have additional time to develop meaningful comments. After conferring with the project partners, MassDEP extended the deadline through October 30.

The Advisory Board encourages local officials, residents, businesses, environmental advocates, and ratepayers to use the additional time to understand not only what is proposed, but what these choices could mean for their communities — what may need to be built, paid for, disrupted, or given up along the way.

Additional resources on the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan, including community-level information, are available at mwraadvisoryboard.com.

About the MWRA Advisory Board

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The MWRA Advisory Board represents 60 communities across the MWRA service area and advocates on behalf of member communities and their ratepayers for safe, reliable, environmentally responsible, and fiscally sound regional water and wastewater services.

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