



# Town of Orleans

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## Finance Committee

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## Memorandum

**To:** Mefford Runyon, Chairman, Orleans Select Board

**CC:** Members of the Select Board  
John Kelly, Town Administrator

**Date:** January 8, 2022

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At this past week's Finance Committee meeting, we voted unanimously in support of a Fin Comm letter to the Select Board, asking that you take the lead in providing an update for the residents and businesses in Town who are or will be or may be impacted by the Downtown Sewer Project and/or the under-discussion Meetinghouse Pond (MHP) project (with parameters yet to be fully defined) and/or potential subsequent projects (eg, the Tonset Road and Rock Harbor watersheds as well as a number of freshwater ponds). What we are particularly interested in is an update that would advise or perhaps remind residents and businesses with regard to the property owner cost components of these sewer projects. Further, to the extent known today, we suggest informing property owners how connection and other costs might be paid over time.

At our November 18, 2021 Finance Committee meeting, we had a very helpful sewer project and planning update from the AECOM and Tighe & Bond consultants (which leveraged the material presented to the Select Board the week before). A number of cost-specific concerns were raised during that meeting ~~by Fin Comm members directly impacted by the Downtown Sewer Project or potentially impacted by the proposed MHP project~~ - questions about funding and the impact of the cost components of living/owning property in any of the areas being sewered. We talked again about these questions and concerns at our next Fin Comm meeting on December 9, and agreed that I would attend the next monthly meeting of the Board of Water & Sewer Commissioners (BOWSC) on December 15 to bring our concerns to their attention.

In the meantime, I reviewed my copy of the (Sewer)" Property Owner's Guidebook" as well as the "Sewer Use Rules & Regulations" to confirm what property-specific cost information is provided. In the "Rules & Regulations", Article III - Sections 8, 9 and 10 identify the types of costs to be paid by property owners - but there are no cost estimates. And Article VI - User Charges and Fees - Section 3 and Appendix E - Fee Schedule together describe User Charges (which are based on water usage). However, But likely it would be helpful to have this information easier to find - and to understand. Granted, each property will have a different connection configuration - which will drive the costs. And topography and soil conditions will impact the connection-to-the-sewer-line costs as well. But even providing a basic "kindergarten" drawing ~~(with no offense intended to modern day kindergartners)~~ - keyed to the cost components with estimates and cost ranges - ~~that~~ would be very helpful. Perhaps it's time for a user-friendly article in one of the local newspapers?

The easement topic is another important one for the MHP area residents. This is wWater over the dam for the Downtown property owners. ~~B~~ but a New World for the MHP residents. It would be very helpful to start communications

now - when already some MHP area residents have perhaps been misinformed or are concerned about the drilling in local roads and heavy equipment parked (albeit temporarily) on private property.

At the December 15 BOWSC meeting, I presented Fin Comm's recommendation for a communication campaign, focused at least in part on property-owner capital costs and operating costs and perhaps a bit more about the overall project process for the MHP residents. There were no questions or comments - and there was no indication that the BOWSC would take ownership of the issue.

Fast forward through the holidays to last week's Fin Comm meeting as noted above. We understand that there is much to be decided yet with regard to the Betterment Bylaw - presuming that the State approves the Town's proposed strategy for having a usage-based Betterment allocation. The Town had previously committed to a funding strategy for the Downtown Sewer project - with the "users" - the property owners - to pay for the "collection system", primarily through the Betterment as well as on-going O&M charges on their usage-based sewer bills and—with the taxpayers paying for the Wastewater Treatment Facility. But the math gets a little more complicated for MHP residents\_—with few "big users" (commercial properties) to help carry the burden of an MHP "collection system".

~~But i~~In the meantime, with the "first flush" for the Downtown Sewer Project just 6-8 months away, and MHP project planning continuing, it would be very helpful to provide some further, timely communication for property owners regarding the other cost components - application fees, engineering fees, connection fees, the connection itself (the pipe to the road), possibly a pump for below-grade properties (and the O&M that goes with these pumps), plus quarterly~~monthly~~ usage-based sewer charges. With the Betterment yet to be determined. If there is to be a Warrant Article for the authorization of the MHP phase of the sewer project at the May Town Meeting, then better-informed citizens would be more likely to support the requested funding.

As noted above, a user-friendly article in a local newspaper - with the same information echoed on the Town website - would be helpful. Simply discussing the information at a Select Board meeting during a routine sewer project update does not provide enough detail and does not reach all of those impacted by the various components of the sewer projects and planned projects. ~~Some surprises can be fun—but unknown or unanticipated costs—not so much.—~~

Please call or write with any questions. .

On behalf of the Finance Committee,

Lynn Bruneau / Finance Committee Chairman