

Orleans Sewer Project: Protecting Our Waters, Planning for Our Future

How it all Came to Be

Historical Context:

- Initiated by early environmental studies, the project has progressed through numerous town meeting approvals that helped identify and secure significant funding resources.
- The town has worked closely with local, regional, and state partners to develop and implement the sewer plan.

Funding Approach:

- Utilizing grants, town appropriations, and contributions from the Cape & Islands Water Protection Fund, we've secured substantial funding, including a 25% subsidy to reduce costs. Orleans also benefits from State Revolving Fund loans, which provide 0% interest financing on eligible costs, saving the town and taxpayers millions of dollars in borrowing costs.
- By proactively addressing wastewater management, Orleans property owners are exempt from new state requirements mandating costly septic system upgrades.

Why Are We Doing This?

Environmental Challenges:

- Traditional septic systems release nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous into our groundwater, leading to degraded water quality in local estuaries and ponds.
- Elevated nutrient levels harm marine habitats, affecting fisheries and recreational waters.

Mandates and Community Vision:

- The Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection now requires nitrogen-reducing solutions for areas designated as sensitive due to impacts on marine ecosystems. Orleans' proactive sewerage approach helps meet these requirements while avoiding costly individual septic system upgrades for property owners.
- The community is committed to maintaining Orleans' natural beauty and ensuring a healthy environment for future generations.

Benefits of the Sewer Project

Environmental Protection:

- Improved water quality supports healthier marine ecosystems.
- By reducing nitrogen discharge, we aim to restore and protect our estuaries and ponds.

Economic Development:

- Enhanced infrastructure supports commercial development and housing stock in the Village Center.
- Clean waterways contribute to maintaining and potentially increasing property values.
- Improved water quality helps protect marine life and ecosystems, strengthening Orleans' fisheries, tourism, and other water-based industries that drive local economic growth.

Public Health:

- Effective wastewater management helps to safeguard our groundwater resources.
- Reducing pollutants promotes overall public health.

Future-Readiness:

- The sewer system is designed to accommodate future environmental changes, including sea level rise that may affect groundwater levels.
- This project is a cornerstone of Orleans' comprehensive infrastructure strategy.

Project Timeline & Key Milestones

Current Status:

- Phase 1: Completed with most properties already connected to the sewer system.
- Phase 2: Underway, focusing on the Meetinghouse Pond Area, completion scheduled for early 2026.
- Phase 3: Planning and design are complete; funding and approval process starting this year.
- Long-Term Vision: The project is structured for 16 phases; all of which may not be needed. If Adaptive Management makes only minor changes in the next decades, full implementation by 2067.

Understanding Costs to Property Owners

Connection Requirements:

- Properties within designated sewer service areas are required to connect upon project completion.
- Property owners will receive notices detailing connection deadlines and procedures.
- For questions or assistance, contact the Sewer Program Coordinator at 508-240-3700, ext. 2319.

Cost Components:

- Costs may include connection fees (design and construction), on-site plumbing modifications, and possible equipment installations like grinder pumps.
- Programs like Cape Cod Aquifund offer low-interest loans for homeowners, while local banks provide business loans for sewer connections. Eligible homeowners may also qualify for the Massachusetts Residential Property Tax Credit to help offset costs.
- Property owners are encouraged to consult with licensed engineers and contractors to obtain detailed cost assessments specific to each property.
- Property owners in the sewer service area will pay a fair share of infrastructure costs based on water usage. These betterment costs can be financed over 30 years at low-interest rates to ease the financial burden; a quarterly operational cost covers wastewater treatment and a basic service fee.

