UNDERSTANDING

Paying for Green Infastructure

WHAT IT IS

Paying for green infrastructure projects can happen in a variety of ways. Green infrastructure facilities can be integrated into projects where stormwater management is already a component. This often presents important savings in avoided costs. Green infrastructure can also be paid for through a variety of mechanisms, including: stormwater utilities, fees tied to permitting, connection fees, establishment of betterments and management districts, bonds and loans, and sponsorships. While stormwater utilities are covered in a separate fact sheet within this series, the other financing mechanisms are described in more detail below.

AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Wherever there are considerations of stormwater management, as there are in most public development or redevelopment projects, there is a role for green infrastructure. Funding for green infrastructure work can come from a variety of sources already used to cover the costs of such projects, including roads, combined sewers, railways, sidewalks, and schools. See diagram below.

Opportunities for Integrating Green Infrastructure with Other Projects

Recognizing the full value of green infrastructure can be an important impetus for integration of such facilities in existing projects. These are often referred to as secondary benefits. These are not typically part of stormwater projects that rely solely on traditional "gray"/underground infrastructure. Secondary benefits include: social, such as avoided flooding and healthier neighborhoods; economic, such as job creation and increased property values; and environmental such as cleaner waters and improved air quality. This more comprehensive accounting method is known as the "Triple Bottom Line" of green infrastructure used most notably by Philadelphia in their planning for green infrastructure. (For more information on the Triple Bottom Line approach, see Philadelphia's Long Term Control Plan Update (2009).) By integrating green infrastructure across the range of municipal projects while also accounting for all of the benefits to be derived, proponents can think more broadly and call on a far wider range of sources for project funding. (See Pioneer Valley Green Infrastructure Plan, page 82-84 for matrix showing Potential Sources for Enhanced Project Funding at: http://www.pvpc.org/plans/pioneer-valley-green-infrastructure-plan .

The City of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, accounted for these benefits in terms of "avoided costs or savings." With a goal of reducing annual average stormwater runoff by 1.053 billion gallons within the next 25 years, the city developed a study—drawing from their green infrastructure plan and a national valuation guide. The study involved placing a value on practices, such as bioretention and other infiltration practices by monetizing the benefits of services, such as: improved water quality, increased groundwater recharge, reduced flooding, reduced energy use, and reduced atmospheric CO2. The result is projections showing significant annual avoided costs/savings at the end of the 25-year implementation period. See table below.

Projected annual avoided costs/savings in Lancaster, PA, case study (benefits accrued at end of 25-year implementation period)	
$122.4 billion per year	Water - Avoided costs for wastewater treatment and the use of traditional "gray infrastructure" through green roofs, tree planting, permeable pavement, bioretention and infiltration practices, and water harvesting
$2,368,000	Energy - Reduced electricity and natural gas usage due to green roofs, tre planting, water harvesting, providing insulation shading, wind blocking, and evaporation

$1,023,000	Air quality - Reduced emissions of nitrogen dioxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, and particulate matter due to uptake and absorption, reduced energy emissions, reduced ozone with trees, green roofs, permeable pavement, and bioretention and infiltration practices
$786,000	Climate change-related benefits in reduced CO2 through direct carbon sequestration, reduced water and wastewater treatment, reduced energy production due to vegetation and permeability.

Source: Webinar presented by Hal Sprague of Center for Neighborhood Technology, Valuing Green Infrastructure: Economic, Environmental, and Social Benefits, September 26, 2013, for the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources.

Portland Takes Direct Approach

A national leader in green infrastructure, the City of Portland, Oregon, took a direct approach to integrating green infrastructure into projects as a way to abate stormwater flows into the combined sewer system. One strategy entailed adopting a green streets policy whereby all City of Portland funded development, redevelopment or enhancement projects meeting the threshold in their stormwater management manual (of developing or redeveloping 500 square feet of impervious surface) must incorporate green street facilities.1 This policy led to what EPA has described as, "...a formal process to overlay multi-bureau project plans and scheduled capital improvement projects to identify how public and private projects can achieve multiple community and environmental benefits through green infrastructure."2 To cover the costs of green streets projects, Portland supplemented funds from general budget and capital improvement funds with innovation grants from EPA, revenue from a stormwater utility fee and from a one percent tax on construction projects that cannot meet the City's stormwater management regulations. What they learned, as did other case study communities examined by EPA, is that the increased investment necessary to include green infrastructure in large undertakings is typically a very small percentage of the total project costs. In addition, the use of green infrastructure elements can also decrease overall project costs, particularly with reductions in use of concrete or asphalt.

Portland's story underscores how integrating or overlapping green infrastructure with street development, redevelopment, or enhancement can yield tremendous value. For Pioneer Valley cities and towns where might there be other possibilities of overlap that may be worth exploring?

STORMWATER PERMIT FEES

Stormwater permit fees address potential stormwater impacts related to new construction. The fees are typically site specific and can be an unreliable source of funding when development slows.

Currently, three communities in the region assess stormwater permit fees to review and permit new development projects (Agawam, Northampton, and Wilbraham). While there is no direct connection between these permit fees and funds to maintain the stormwater system, stormwater permit fees are paid into general funds, and most communities pay for stormwater system maintenance from the general funds. In a sense, then, some part of these permit fees may help to cover some stormwater system maintenance costs.

CONNECTION FEES

Northampton is one community that currently charges a fee for a property's initial connection to the stormwater system. Connection fees for stormwater might be augmented based on a practice in Westfield relative to wastewater. The City of Westfield established a connection fee associated with new sewer hook ups aimed at helping to increase capacity at the wastewater treatment plant (where the City was reaching capacity). For every new gallon of sewage to be generated, the customer pays a fee equivalent to the cost of fixing 5 gallons worth of infiltration and inflow. It may be worth exploring whether this same strategy could be applied to stormwater whereby new connections to the system help to mitigate other flows into the system, thereby preserving capacity and avoiding the need for costly expansion projects.

BETTERMENTS AND MANAGEMENT DISTRICTS

MGL Chapter 80 allows for the assessment of cost of public improvements by municipalities. Whenever a certain location or district receives exclusive benefit or advantage from a public improvement, betterments can be assessed in that area for the improvement. This could be the case where several neighborhoods in a town require improved stormwater infrastructure. The cost of improvements can be offset by charges to those properties located within that jurisdiction.

To implement the Long Creek Watershed Management Plan in Maine (the result of a citizen's lawsuit over impaired waters), landowners in four municipalities joined forces to create the Long Creek Watershed Management Plan District. The District collects fees from property owners and uses the money to restore Long Creek and install stormwater retrofits. The fee is $3,000 per acre of impervious surface per year.

BONDS AND LOANS

Bonds are useful to initiate large capital projects, but they involve borrowing money and accruing debt. MassDEP's Clean Water State Revolving Loan Fund (SRF) has been an important source for low interest loans for many water infrastructure projects in the Pioneer Valley.

A 2014 letter from MassDEP Division Municipal Services Director Steve McCurdy, notes that MassDEP will receive a $47.6 million federal grant to subsidize the CWSRF program and that at least 10 % of these monies must be dedicated in 2014 to Green Infrastructure projects or components as defined by EPA. The 2014 Intended Use Plan lists 12 new Green Infrastructure construction projects in Massachusetts and 3additional Green Infrastructure construction projects are on the 2014 Carry-Over list. "The exact monetary value of the Green components of these projects will be determined when project applications are submitted, but are expected to be well in excess of the $4.76 million requirement," he concludes.

In addition, the SRF program has offered principal forgiveness for Environmental Justice projects, those projects occurring in areas defined to be a neighborhood with annual median household income (MHI) less than 65 percent of the state MHI.

SPONSORSHIPS

Several communities have been able to tap into local businesses to provide donations and sponsorships for green infrastructure projects.

In Portland, Maine, businesses helped to cover $20,000 of the $64,000 cost for a demonstration rain garden along the tidal Back Cove. The garden covers 2.5 acres of land adjacent to a popular recreational trail that is heavily used by walkers, joggers, and cyclists. The project's popularity led to the installation of a second rain garden adjacent to the trail's parking area, which was designed and funded by Stantec, a national engineering firm with local offices. Signage at the rain gardens highlights corporate sponsors.8 This idea builds on the successful Adopt a Trail corporate sponsorship program run by Portland's local land trust.

In Lynchburg, Virginia, a new corporate sponsorship program is drawing funding for the installation of demonstration rain gardens in prominent public places throughout the City. Each garden is sponsored by a local business, which is then credited with an attractive sign onsite. To date, this program has raised over $1.6 million and established 50 gardens.

Virginia also has a related statewide program called Streetscape Appearance Green Enhancement (SAGE), a comprehensive roadside management program that has been in existence since 2006. Funded entirely by donations, but managed by municipalities, the program aims to beautify local streetscapes, boost civic and community pride, and facilitate future economic development. Municipalities manage the donations through a 501 (c)3 non-profit and contributions are organized so as to cover construction, maintenance, and renewal, typically after 5 years.

OTHER POTENTIAL AND FUTURE SOURCES

Hazard Mitigation Funding

Though green infrastructure implemented area wide could help to mitigate natural hazards and build community resiliency, grant programs out of the Massachusetts and Federal Emergency Management Agencies do not as of yet provide opportunities for funding of green infrastructure stormwater management projects. The Massachusetts Emergency Management Grant Program's State Hazard Mitigation Officer Richard Zingarelli notes:

Standard hazard mitigation projects require a benefit-cost analysis that shows that the cost of the project is exceeded by the benefit as measured by direct reduction of damages from natural hazards. The difficulty is that it is difficult, if not impossible, to quantify a direct reduction in damage that results from measures like green roofs and porous pavement. As a result, any limited eligibility for funding in these programs would fall under the "5% Initiative" of the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), which allows for setting aside up to 5% of the total available HMGP funding for activities that are difficult to evaluate using traditional cost-effectiveness criteria.

It is important to know that the use of the word "mitigation" in emergency preparedness means avoidance and preparation (resiliency) and is more closely linked to the concept of "adaptation" in climate change.

WATER QUALITY CREDITS TRADING

Water quality trading is a market-based approach—an idea that has emerged from the energy market—that enables jurisdictions to achieve needed pollution controls through the purchase of credits for a particular pollutant. Landowners can produce water quality credits by implementing green infrastructure practices that reduce volume and pollutants, and typically at a much lower cost than a municipal treatment facility. EPA notes, "Through water quality trading, facilities that face higher pollutant control costs to meet their regulatory obligations can purchase pollutant reduction credits from other sources that can generate these reductions at lower cost, thus achieving the same or better overall water quality improvement. In most cases, trading takes place on a watershed level under a pollutant cap (the total pollutant load that can be assimilated by a waterbody without exceeding water quality standards) developed through the TMDL

process or a similar type of water quality analysis that produces information on pollutant loadings and resulting water quality conditions."

For the Long Island Sound TMDL, the state of Connecticut adopted trading legislation. Public Act No. 01-180, which establishes the trading framework for a Long Island Sound Nitrogen Credit Exchange Program to be directed by a Nitrogen Credit Advisory Board appointed by the General Assembly and the governor. EPA notes, "The Nitrogen Credit Exchange Program establishes a well-defined trading structure supported and regulated by limits mandated in state law. The state legislation specifies trading ratios (e.g., delivery and location ratios) and accounting methodologies to formalize all calculations used in trading."

LINKS TO MORE INFORMATION

ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE CENTER UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND. 2014. LOCAL GOVERNMENT STORMWATERFINANCING MANUAL: A PROCESS FOR PROGRAM REFORM. SEE:
http://efc.umd.edu/assets/efc_stormwater_financing_manual_final_(1).pdf

NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL. FEBRUARY 2012. FINANCING STORMWATER RETROFITS IN PHILADELPHIA AND BEYOND. SEE:
http://www.nrdc.org/water/files/stormwaterfinancing-report.pdf

UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY. 2013. COMMUNITY BASED PUBLIC PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS FOR GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE-DRIVEN STORMWATER RETROFITS: A WEBINAR.

ENVIRONMENTAL FINANCE CENTER, UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA. 2014. A CATALOG OF FINANCE PUBLICATIONS ON GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE APPROACHES TO STORMWATER MANAGEMENT. SEE:
http://www.efc.sog.unc.edu/reslib/item/catalog-green-infrastructure-and-stormwater-finance-publications

USEPA. 2009. FUNDING STORMWATER PROGRAMS FACTSHEET. SEE:
www.epa.gov/region1/npdes/stormwater/assets/pdfs/FundingStormwater.pdf

CHARLES RIVER WATERSHED ASSOCIATION FOR MA COASTAL ZONE MANAGEMENT. 2007. ASSESSMENT OF STORMWATER FINANCING MECHANISMS IN NEW ENGLAND. SEE:
www.crwa.org/projects/stormwater/Municipal%20SFM%20Case%20Studies%20Repo.pdf

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