

Summary of Rhode Island Municipal Onsite Wastewater Programs

September 30, 2014

The R.I. Department of Environmental Management (DEM) has established minimum standards for onsite wastewater treatment systems throughout the state- *Rules Establishing Minimum Standards Relating to Location, Design, Construction and Maintenance of Onsite Wastewater Treatment Systems*. The rules are available online at: <http://www.dem.ri.gov/pubs/regs/regs/water/owts14.pdf>. DEM also encourages municipalities to establish local programs to meet the onsite wastewater needs of each community. Cities and towns have authority under state law to establish local management programs to encourage or require septic system maintenance. Most of these programs have been created with the assistance of State Bond funds or Federal Nonpoint Source funds distributed through DEM grants (with the exception of New Shoreham, where an EPA grant was used). Towns use these funds to develop an onsite wastewater management plan (OWMP) designed to meet local needs. An OWMP describes the elements of the municipal management program for septic systems. Program elements may include, for example, passing an ordinance requiring system inspections, enhancing homeowner education, or specifying more stringent treatment requirements in environmentally sensitive areas. Once approved by DEM, an OWMP makes a town eligible to apply to the Community Septic System Loan Program (CSSLP). CSSLP has been the primary incentive for towns to develop an OWMP. CSSLP funds come from the State Revolving Fund and are administered by Rhode Island Housing. Money is used by participating towns to provide low-interest loans to homeowners to cover the costs associated with septic system repairs and upgrades.

This document provides a brief summary of local onsite wastewater management in Rhode Island. Eighteen towns have an approved OWMP; fourteen participate in the CSSLP. The following cities and towns are primarily served by sewers and have not initiated local efforts to manage septic systems: Barrington, Central Falls, East Providence, Lincoln, Newport, North Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, West Warwick, and Woonsocket.

Bristol: Much of the Town of Bristol is served by municipal sewers, but some onsite systems are in use. Bristol has an approved OWMP and is participating in the CSSLP. The plan calls for voluntary system inspections and homeowner education.

Burrillville: Burrillville does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

Charlestown: Charlestown has an approved OWMP and has a robust municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town charter includes a dedicated staff

person to run the onsite wastewater program. The town has a wastewater management ordinance requiring periodic inspection of onsite systems. The town also maintains a web-based septic system inventory and tracking program, and is in the midst of a town-wide cesspool phase-out program. Charlestown also participates in the CSSLP.

Coventry: Coventry has an approved OWMP and participates in the CSSLP. The approved OWMP proposes phased implementation of a management program based on improving homeowner awareness, creating a septic system inventory, and promoting voluntary system inspections. The management program focuses on making financial assistance available to repair or replace failed systems and cesspools.

Cranston: The City of Cranston is primarily served by sewers and does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

Cumberland: Cumberland does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

East Greenwich: East Greenwich has a municipal sewer system for the area east of Route 2, serving approximately two-thirds of the town's population. The rest of the town is served by onsite systems. The town does not have an approved OWMP.

Exeter: Exeter has an approved OWMP. The plan calls for education and outreach efforts to encourage homeowners to properly maintain septic systems and recommends voluntary system inspections.

Foster: Foster has an approved OWMP. The plan utilizes education and outreach efforts to encourage voluntary system inspections. The town also utilizes a web-based inventory program.

Glocester: Glocester has an approved OWMP and has implemented a limited municipal onsite wastewater management program. The town participates in the CSSLP. The management program encourages voluntary system inspections. The town also requires local review and a special-use permit for proposed onsite systems located within 150 feet of a waterbody.

Hopkinton: Hopkinton has an approved OWMP. The plan calls for education and outreach efforts to encourage homeowners to properly maintain septic systems and recommends voluntary system inspections.

Jamestown: Jamestown has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town participates in the CSSLP. Jamestown has an onsite wastewater management ordinance requiring septic system inspections at regular intervals. The town also has a High Groundwater Overlay Zone specifying additional septic system siting and treatment requirements. Jamestown uses a web-based inventory and tracking program to monitor septic system maintenance and track performance.

Johnston: Johnston has an approved OWMP and is participating in the CSSLP. The plan utilizes education and outreach efforts to encourage voluntary system inspections.

Little Compton: Little Compton does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

Middletown: Middletown does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

Narragansett: Narragansett has an approved OWMP and participates in the CSSLP. The town does not have an onsite wastewater management ordinance, but the zoning ordinance sets more stringent standards than the state regulations for septic system siting. The town utilities ordinance requires septic system pumping at least every 4 years, with records submitted to the town.

New Shoreham: The Town of New Shoreham has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has an onsite wastewater management ordinance requiring system inspections and maintenance. A town-wide cesspool phase-out program is ongoing. New Shoreham's zoning ordinance specifies treatment standards based on location and soil conditions. The town also participates in the CSSLP.

North Kingstown: The Town of North Kingstown has an approved OWMP and has a municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has an onsite wastewater management ordinance requiring septic system inspection and maintenance at regular intervals. The town participates in the CSSLP with loan funds administered by the Water Department.

North Smithfield: North Smithfield currently has no formal municipal onsite wastewater management program. Basic outreach materials for septic system operations and maintenance are available on the Town's web site.

Portsmouth: Portsmouth does not currently have a DEM-approved municipal onsite wastewater management plan. The town is currently developing a program for enhanced management of onsite systems.

Richmond: Richmond has an approved OWMP. The plan calls for education and outreach efforts to encourage homeowners to properly maintain septic systems and recommends voluntary system inspections.

Scituate: Scituate has an approved OWMP. The plan utilizes education and outreach efforts to encourage voluntary system inspections. The town also utilizes a web-based inventory program. The town participates in the CSSLP.

Smithfield: Smithfield does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

South Kingstown: South Kingstown has an approved OWMP and has an onsite wastewater management program in place. The town has a wastewater management ordinance requiring inspection of onsite systems. A town-wide cesspool phase-out is nearly complete with all required deadlines having passed. Cesspools discovered via the inspection program had to be upgraded within 5 years of discovery. Cesspools were also required to be upgraded within 12 months of the sale of a property. The South Kingstown zoning ordinance contains more stringent setbacks from natural features than the state requirements. South Kingstown uses a web-base inventory and tracking program and participates in the CSSLP.

Tiverton: Tiverton has an approved OWMP and an onsite wastewater management program, including a management ordinance. The town participates in the CSSLP. The ordinance requires septic system inspection and maintenance and mandates the installation of access risers and effluent filters when systems are repaired or upgraded. Tiverton is in the process of implementing a limited cesspool phase-out program. The Town has focused initially on the Stafford Pond watershed and has nearly completed upgrades in this area. Coastal areas in Tiverton are still subject to the R.I. Cesspool Act of 2007 because the Town program specifies later deadlines than the State program.

Warren: Although much of the Town of Warren is served by sewers, the Touisset Neck section of town is not. The Town has an approved OWMP for the un-sewered areas of town. The plan proposes an aggressive monitoring and oversight program with a web-based inventory and tracking system. Warren participates in the CSSLP.

Warwick: Much of Warwick is sewerred, but a significant number of onsite systems remain. The city is in the process of implementing a mandatory sewer tie-in program. Lots with access to municipal sewers will be required to abandon their onsite system and connect to the sewer line upon sale of the property. The city is considering the development of a management program for those areas where sewer service will not be extended.

West Greenwich: The Town of West Greenwich does not have an active municipal onsite wastewater management program at this time.

Westerly: The Town of Westerly has a municipal sewer system serving the downtown area, corresponding to approximately half the town's population. The rest of the town is served by onsite systems. Westerly has an approved OWMP which calls for creation of a wastewater management district for areas not currently served by sewers and where the Wastewater Facilities Plan indicates sewer extensions are not planned. Within this district, the Town will create a homeowner education and outreach program and create a computerized inventory containing results of voluntary inspections. The town participates in the CSSLP.