

Coalition launches #InvestInWaterMA campaign to support water/sewer infrastructure

Campaign stresses billions of dollars in unmet needs—“Don’t let out of sight mean out of mind” for critical underground water assets

QUINCY, Mass., September 22, 2021—Aiming to make investment in critically important water, sewer, and wastewater infrastructure the top priority it must be for new infrastructure funding, a broad coalition of businesses, professional associations, and public-sector leaders today kicked off a new #InvestInWaterMA campaign.

#InvestInWaterMA will highlight the critical importance that safe, reliable water and sewer infrastructure play in protecting Massachusetts residents’ public health and the Commonwealth’s beautiful natural resources and environment and promoting jobs and economic development.

Supported by American Council of Engineering Companies of Massachusetts, MassBIO, the Massachusetts Water Works Association, NAIOP, the New England Water Works Association, and the Wastewater Advisory Committee to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, the #InvestInWaterMA campaign is being organized and led by the Utility Contractors Association of New England (UCANE).

“Roads, bridges, mass transit, and other forms of infrastructure may be more immediately visible to people around Massachusetts, but it’s every bit as important to make sure our water and sewer infrastructure is bringing us clean, safe water supplies, mitigating and preventing flooding, and protecting our environment,” said UCANE President Marcella Albanese, CEO of Albanese Brothers Inc., a Dracut general contractor. “We and our coalition partners will be working to recruit thousands of supporters in every corner of the Commonwealth to keep the #InvestInWaterMA message in front of elected officials and decisionmakers as they’re making infrastructure decisions.”

Tamara Small, CEO of NAIOP Massachusetts, The Commercial Real Estate Development Association, said: “Reliable, modern water infrastructure is critical to the health and well-being of Massachusetts’ residents and businesses. It is crucial that we make these investments now.”

Jennifer Pederson, executive director of the Massachusetts Water Works Association, said: “Everyone deserves clean drinking water, and our drinking water operators work hard to provide it. However, much of our infrastructure is aging, and unfortunately in more and more communities, treatment is needed to address emerging water quality threats. People are currently paying far more for other services like cable television and cell phones than they are paying for their drinking water, and they don’t think twice about it. Think for a moment about living without water for even a day and it is unimaginable. The time has come to recognize how valuable this essential service is and to support needed investment in our drinking water systems.”

Andreae Downs, director of the MWRA Wastewater Advisory Committee and a city councilor in Newton, said: “The MWRA was founded in 1985 to address long-term disinvestment in sewer treatment in the Boston area. Its creation cleaned up Boston Harbor to the point where the Harbor beaches are the cleanest urban beaches in the nation. Maintaining that multi-billion-dollar investment is what the Wastewater Advisory Committee and MWRA Advisory Board are all about. Maintenance saves ratepayers money, and it keeps our water clean.”

Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker, state legislative leaders, members of the Commonwealth’s U.S. Senate and House delegations, and city, town, and water/sewer district leaders over the coming year will be making critical decisions about where and how to invest billions of dollars in federal infrastructure and COVID relief funding.

Some of the key messages #InvestInWaterMA will highlight statewide through events, presentations, and speaking tours and on social media include:

- Massachusetts cities, towns, and regional water utilities face an infrastructure funding crisis, including a funding gap estimated by the Office of the State Auditor in 2017 as \$18 billion over 20 years for drinking-water infrastructure alone and billions more for sanitary sewers, stormwater facilities, and remediation of combined sewer overflows (CSOs) that still pour millions of gallons of raw sewage into rivers like the Merrimack during storms.
- While this year’s big increase in federal funding is welcomed and needed, it comes against a backdrop of 50 years of declining federal and state aid to cities, towns, and water/sewer districts for infrastructure investment that has forced billions of dollars of backlogs of deferred maintenance and investment.
- Investing in water infrastructure is a proven winner for generating and sustaining economic growth—the Edward J. Collins, Jr. Center for Public Policy at UMass-Boston, in a study commissioned by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority Advisory Board, showed that every \$1 million invested in water/wastewater infrastructure generates anywhere from \$2 million to \$14 million in new taxes plus another \$2.6 million to \$6.8 million in private-sector economic activity, or a potential \$20-for-\$1 return, particularly with projects that facilitate development or redevelopment of real estate.

“As our campaign slogan puts it, we want to make sure that we ‘don’t let out of sight mean out of mind’ when it comes to the need to invest billions of dollars in water and sewer infrastructure,” said UCANE Executive Director Jeff Mahoney.

UCANE is comprised of over 250 major contractors and associated businessmen and women who perform underground utility construction projects (including water, sewer, electrical, gas, and fiber-optic telecommunications) primarily in Massachusetts and throughout New England. Members include both union and non-union companies and range from small, family-owned businesses to large corporations and include many minority- and women-owned businesses and Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (DBEs).

Speaking to the importance of the issues #InvestInWaterMA is focusing on, Arlington Town Engineer Wayne Chouinard, chair of the MWRA Wastewater Advisory Committee, said: “We just can’t let up. Arlington has been giving a solid effort addressing sewer inflow and infiltration issues for more than a decade by investigating and correcting problems in sections across Town. Due to limited funding, we repair the most cost-effective issues first. Unfortunately, there

are over 100 miles of sewer pipes under the streets, and we have a backlog of over \$6 million of work. We are finding the problems, but due to the size of the system it is aging faster than we can fix it. Like so many other communities around Massachusetts, Arlington can't afford to lose momentum."

To sign on as an #InvestInWaterMA campaign supporter and join our mailing list for updates and action alerts, please visit www.ucane.com/investinwaterma