

Dear CSO permittees of the Clean Waterways, Healthy Neighborhoods Initiative,

Thank you for presenting at the March 7 *Clean Waterways, Healthy Neighborhoods* meeting. As you know, this is a critical point in the development of the CSO Long Term Control plans, and input on the alternatives should be gathered from the Supplemental CSO team and the public prior to submitting the document to the NJDEP.

The CSO Supplemental Team is intended to be a resource to you and to “enable you to better develop an outreach program that reaches a broad base of citizens” (*Forming and Utilizing Your CSO Supplemental Team*). Supplemental team members are able to provide input on the evaluation of CSO control alternatives, the selection of the CSO controls, and the planning process (from Section G.2.c of the NJDEP CSO Permit). Unfortunately, a number of the supplemental team members were not in attendance at the March 7 meeting and there was insufficient time available for feedback from supplemental team members on how best to communicate this information to the general public.

Below are recommendations from the Sewage-Free Advisory Committee, which includes several members of the regional supplemental team, on how best to inform and engage a broad range of citizens in the evaluation of alternatives.

Recommendations on engaging the public in the evaluation of alternatives:

1. In addition to the March 7 meeting, permittees should hold dynamic public workshops in their municipalities that engage the public in a discussion about the alternatives, rather than being just a one-way presentation of the alternatives being evaluated to reduce combined sewer overflows. Additional workshops should be proposed to local groups, such as green teams and environmental commissions, as should a presentation at City Council meetings. Interactions with the public should be tailored for a lay audience and focus on effectiveness, cost, combinations of solutions, and potential disruptions rather than high-level technical engineering specifics.
2. Permittees and consultants working on the plans should detail what they considered in their evaluation of green infrastructure and community benefits. If using small-scale samples such as the Rutgers University/PVSC’s Green Infrastructure Feasibility Studies, permittees and consultants should communicate clearly that the study is a preliminary analysis of low-hanging-fruit projects and then detail how the permit holder will build upon this first effort for the larger purpose of the LTCP alternatives analysis.

3. Permittees should focus on the information that is most critical to the public, such as flooding, floatables (e.g., litter), public access to waterfronts, affordability, green infrastructure, workforce opportunities and water quality. Presentations should begin with what will affect the public the most and at a very local level. There are a number of slides that were presented on March 7 that are less critical for the public and dilute the purpose of communicating this information to a general audience.
4. Presentations should include general information on the CSO permit that focuses on the process and purpose of the public's involvement in the alternatives analysis and the implementation of the LTCP.
5. Presentations should include sufficient time for the public to ask questions and time for the permittee to ask the public questions.

The Sewage-Free Streets and Rivers advisory committee supports the the following recommendations on general public outreach that several Municipal Action Teams submitted to permit holders last year to assist with community outreach.

- Designate consistent dates and times for public meetings
- Provide an agenda for each meeting at least one week in advance
- Develop a publicly accessible online platform for sharing of meeting materials, including presentations, meeting schedules, agendas, documents produced under the CSO permit, fact sheets and other educational material
- Provide multilingual information on the initiative, including fact sheets and points of contact for additional information
- Presentations by all parties should explain clearly any technical jargon and quantitative data
- Establish a feedback-loop communication model, where there is a clear route through which the public and the permittees can share information and comments, and indicate how this feedback is being incorporated into the resulting plans
- Provide not just a timeline of the permit deliverables, but also indication of where there is opportunity for public comment within that timeline, and
- Release key documents (e.g. Alternatives Analysis, etc.) in draft form, with enough time for meaningful public comment, before they are finalized

Sincerely,

Sewage-Free Streets and Rivers Advisory Committee:  
Drew Curtis, Ironbound Community Corporation

Kim Gaddy, Clean Water Action  
Nicole Miller, Newark DIG  
Michele Langa, Hackensack Riverkeeper  
Lisa Simms, NJ Tree Foundation  
Greg Remaud, NY/NJ Baykeeper  
Steve Kehayes, Paterson Habitat for Humanity  
Mo Kinberg, New Jersey Future

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Dwayne Kobesky, NJDEP  
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Christopher C. Obropta, Associate Extension Specialist in Water Resources, Rutgers Cooperative, CSO Supplemental Team Member Extension Water Resource Program  
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Thomas Gibbons, Jersey City START Chris Vasquez, Kearny AWAKE, CSO Supplemental Team Member  
Laurie Howard, Passaic River Coalition, CSO Supplemental Team Member Sue Levine, Paterson SMART, Supplemental Team Member Alison Cucco, CSO Supplemental Team Member  
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