

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)
TOWN OF EPPING
2025 ARTICLE 3 - WASTEWATER BOND

1. What is the Wastewater Treatment Plant, and why should Epping residents care about it?

Epping's wastewater treatment plant, built in the 1960s, is located on Lagoon Road, just east of the town center on the banks of the Lamprey River. The Epping Water & Sewer District provides water and sewer to over 1,000 homes and businesses, as well as the Town Hall, Library, Safety Facility, Community Theatre, and schools in our town center. Until recently, the treatment plant also received and treated septage from residents on private septic systems.

2. What's the problem with the current plant?

In the last three years, over five million gallons of partially treated sewage has been discharged into the Lamprey River due to numerous problems with the size, condition, and type of treatment technology used at the facility. **Epping has had over 120 violations of its Clean Water Act permit since April 2022, more than any other municipality in New Hampshire.** The current plant lacks backup equipment to ensure that sewage is treated properly when any equipment fails and has relied on open lagoons to hold sewage until the treatment system is operational. Epping is under an EPA order to close the lagoons by 2028 and have an upgraded plant that addresses these capacity, technology, and operational problems.

3. What is being impacted by Epping's Wastewater Treatment Plant?

The pollution from Epping's plant is creating problems both in Epping and for downstream communities. Poorly treated sewage causes concern about safe recreation and harms the ecological health of the Lamprey River. Due to the moratorium, Epping hasn't been able to accept septage, so residents with septic systems are paying more to have their septage hauled to surrounding towns. Our neighbors are also impacted - the Town of Durham and the University of New Hampshire draw much of their drinking water supply from the Lamprey River. Epping's poor plant performance and sewage discharges have forced Durham to stop withdrawing from the Lamprey River for periods of time, creating serious challenges and concerns for Durham residents and the UNH community.

4. How are state and federal environmental agencies responding to the problems at Epping's Sewage Treatment Facility?

Both the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services (NHDES) and the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are deeply concerned about Epping's sewage plant problems. In 2022, NHDES imposed a moratorium on new sewer hookups that won't be lifted until the town has a properly sized, well-functioning sewage treatment facility that complies with the Clean Water Act. Several development projects that have been approved by the Planning Board are on hold.

In 2023, EPA issued an administrative order and corrective action plan that requires Epping to upgrade the plant by 2027 and to come into full compliance with its Clean Water Act permits. The town has been working hard to comply with the Corrective Action Plan, and now needs the support of town residents to do what needs to be done.

5. Who operates and oversees the plant?

Epping's sewage treatment facility is managed by a plant supervisor and a dedicated staff and is overseen by the 3-member Water & Sewer Commission. All members of this commission have come on recently to turn around years of neglect and mismanagement. The Water & Sewer Commission reports to the Selectboard. Underwood Engineering serves as a consultant to the town.

6. Why are voters being asked to approve \$1.8 million this year?

Consultants to the town have developed preliminary plans for an upgrade of the sewage treatment plant that will bring the town into compliance with the Clean Water Act and provide enough capacity for new sewer hookups. The Selectboard, Budget Committee, and Water & Sewer Commission have all recommended a warrant article this year for \$1.8M to develop final engineering designs, a process that will take six months to complete. With final engineering designs, the town will have a more accurate understanding of cost for the upgrade, which will go before voters in 2026. The Town has already been approved for 20% principal forgiveness on the loan and will be applying for many other grants once final designs are in hand.

7. What will happen if Epping doesn't approve funding for upgrading the sewage facility?

If Epping continues to operate the current plant with ongoing permit violations, or fails to upgrade to reliably meet its permit limits, the town will face steep penalties from EPA and NHDES. EPA fines can be as much as \$64,000 per day, while NHDES fines can include administrative, civil and/or criminal penalties of more than \$25,000 per day. **These fines, which will have to be paid through taxation, will quickly amount to millions of dollars that would be better spent on the upgrade.** More and more money will be spent on temporary repairs and staff overtime. In addition, until the plant is improved, the moratorium on new development will remain in place, meaning that additional revenue from septage and new hookups cannot be achieved.

8. Why are all residents being asked to pay for the upgrade when the sewer district only serves the center of town?

All taxpayers are being asked to pay for the upgrade because the town needs sewer service in the town center, in public buildings, and for the commercial district that contributes to the town's tax base. Sewer users pay additional fees, based on how much water they use, which cover the operating cost of the facility. There are many municipal services that all taxpayers support - even if they don't use them frequently or directly - such as schools, parks, and roads. Like these services, water and sewer are necessary to having a well-functioning community.

9. What are other communities in the region doing to properly treat sewage and keep waterways clean?

Over the past 10 years, communities across the greater Seacoast region have made massive investments in improved sewage treatment. Portsmouth recently completed a renovation of the Peirce Island plant that cost more than \$90M, Exeter invested \$50M in an upgraded facility on the Squamscott River, and Newmarket spent \$14M for a high-performing plant on the Lamprey River. Many other communities including Newington, Dover, Durham and Rochester have made substantial improvements to comply with Clean Water Act permits and be good stewards of the waterways in their community and the larger Great Bay region.

Additional information about Epping's wastewater facility can be found at <https://www.eppingnh.gov/water-sewer-commission> and <https://www.eppingnh.gov/water-sewer-ws-plant>