2026 Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade- FAQs

What is the wastewater treatment plant, and why does it matter?

- Epping's wastewater treatment plant was built in the 1960's and is located on Lagoon Road along the Lamprey River.
- It treats sewage from over 1,000 homes and businesses, plus the Town Hall, schools, public safety buildings, and downtown facilities.
- When the plant fails, sewage enters the Lamprey River.

What's wrong with the current plant?

The plant is undersized and lacks backup equipment. Since 2022:

- Over 5 million gallons of partially treated sewage have been illegally discharged into the Lamprey
- 125+ Clean Water Act violations—more than anyone else in New Hampshire
- Equipment failures lead to illegal discharges due to the lack of backup equipment

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Who is being affected?

- **Epping residents**: river health, recreation, property values, higher septage disposal costs
- **Neighboring communities**: Durham and the University of New Hampshire rely on the Lamprey River for drinking water; withdrawals have been interrupted due to Epping's discharges. Epping's illegal discharges impact the health of the Great Bay.

What are regulators saying?

- **NHDES** imposed a development moratorium in 2022—no new sewer hookups or septage receiving
- **EPA** issued a binding Administrative Order requiring full compliance and a plant upgrade by 2028

Failure to act is not an option under federal law.

Why are voters being asked to approve $38 million now?

- Last year, voters approved $1.8M to complete final engineering and design.
- This year's $38M request funds the construction of a properly sized, compliant facility.

The Select Board, Budget Committee, and Water & Sewer Commission all recommend approval.

What happens if the article fails?

If the plant is not upgraded:

- EPA fines up to $68,445 per day
- NHDES fines up to $25,000 per day
- Tax dollars spent on fines, emergency repairs, spare parts, and overtime
- Continued development moratorium
- Rising project costs if delayed (≈ $1.5M per year from inflation)
- Risk of lawsuits from downstream communities, developers, and conservation organizations
- Long-term risk to property values and town reputation
- No new revenues to the sewer fund will increase sewer rates.

The cost of inaction is higher than the cost of action.

Why are all taxpayers paying if the sewer serves only part of the town?

Sewer service supports:

- Public buildings and schools
- The commercial district and tax base
- Acceptance of septage from private tanks
- A clean river and Bay

Sewer users and taxpayers alike fund government operations like roads, schools, police, fire, and parks; sewer infrastructure is a shared municipal responsibility.

Are other towns dealing with this too?

Yes, and they've already acted:

- **Portsmouth** – $90M upgrade (Peirce Island)
- **Exeter** – $50M investment
- **Newmarket** – $14M plant on the Lamprey River

Epping is catching up, not doing something unusual.

What has the town already fixed?

In the last two years, the town has:

- Fully complied with the EPA corrective action plan (except lagoon closure tied to upgrade)
- Replaced membranes and screening equipment
- Built a heated membrane enclosure
- Increased staff from 3 to 5 operators
- Implemented a Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) enforcement program
- Added maintenance tracking, spare parts, and operator training
- Established 24/7 on-call coverage
- Increased reporting and oversight

These actions stabilize the plant. They do not solve its fundamental limitations.

What improves if the article passes?

- Shared funding mechanisms to reduce the tax impact of the bond
- Regular independent operational audits
- Annual NHDES site reviews
- Clear growth planning tied to infrastructure capacity within the town's Master Plan

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How do we know $38M is reasonable?

The project design was independently reviewed by an engineering consulting firm to:

- Verify constructability
- Identify cost-saving changes
- Reduce unnecessary scope