

## Summary of Rhode Island Municipal Onsite Wastewater Programs

September 2022

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: <https://rules.sos.ri.gov/regulations/part/250-150-10-6>. 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. Towns choosing to exercise this authority can 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, educating homeowners on good practices for system maintenance, 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 through a partnership of the R.I. Infrastructure Bank and Rhode Island Housing. Money is used by participating towns to provide interest-free 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. Twenty towns have an approved OWMP; eighteen 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 has implemented 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 OWMP calls for 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. The town does not yet participate in the CSSLP.

**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. The town does not yet participate in the CSSLP.

**Glocester:** Glocester has an approved OWMP and participates in the CSSLP. The OWMP calls for homeowner education and encourages voluntary system inspections.

**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. The town participates in the CSSLP.

**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 calls for 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 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.

**Portsmouth:** Portsmouth has an approved OWMP and has a robust municipal onsite wastewater management program in place. The town planning office includes a dedicated program manager 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. The town is implementing a town-wide program to phase out the use of cesspools. In two priority neighborhoods (Portsmouth Park and Island Park) the town is also phasing out the use of unpermitted, substandard systems. Portsmouth participates in the CSSLP.

**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. The town participates in the CSSLP.

**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 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. The town participates in the CSSLP.

**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 and all deadlines have now 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.. South Kingstown uses a web-based 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. The ordinance also established a point-of-sale upgrade requirement for cesspools, now superseded by State law. The Town's zoning ordinance includes a watershed protection overlay district requiring all cesspools within the Stafford Pond watershed to have been removed from service by 2005. As of 2021, Tiverton is in the process of reorganizing the onsite management program to clarify the respective roles of the town and the Tiverton Wastewater District, the quasi-public agency responsible for the sewer system. The town will take responsibility for ongoing implementation of the onsite management program and the Wastewater District will operate the sewer collection system.

**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. The town will provide up to two pumpouts per year for onsite systems and will provide limited reimbursement towards the cost of operations and maintenance contracts for advanced treatment systems.

**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 are required to abandon their onsite system and connect to the sewer line upon sale of the property.

**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 and has established 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.