File #: 26-1552, **Version:** 1

Agenda Summary

Opposing the draft combined sewer overflows long-term control plan and calling for a regional solution.

Official Text

WHEREAS: Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) occur when wet weather overwhelms the capacity of combined sewer and stormwater systems, causing millions of gallons of untreated wastewater-including raw human waste and harmful pathogens-to be discharged into Alewife Brook annually; and

WHEREAS: These discharges create a public health hazard, degrade our parkland and paths, and pollute our waterways and have an outsized impact on environmental justice communities; and

WHEREAS: Climate change is already causing and will continue to cause increased frequency and intensity of storms with increasing challenges of stormwater management; and

WHEREAS: This problem is regional in origin and scope, and it demands a regional response. Every community in the MWRA sewer district sends its sewage to the Deer Island Treatment Plant, so all share pipes, pumps, and treatment capacity. During large storms, the regional sewer system fills up downstream of the Alewife CSO outfalls, between the Alewife Brook Pump Station and the Chelsea Creek Headworks and between there and the Deer Island Wastewater Treatment Plant. Once the system downstream is at capacity, the combined sewage overflows into the Alewife Brook; and

WHEREAS: The shared sewer infrastructure serving Somerville is also used by many upstream municipalities in the region and stormwater entering the sewer system in these communities, even in separated systems, contribute directly to Somerville CSOs; and

WHEREAS: The MWRA Enabling Act of 1984 established MWRA for the "repair, replacement, rehabilitation, modernization and extension" of the sewer system, "in the best interests of the commonwealth and its inhabitants, to promote the general health and welfare, to improve commerce and living conditions of the citizenry," but it could not anticipate the increasing challenges caused by stormwater in our changing climate; and

WHEREAS: This region has a once-in-a-generation opportunity to rectify these problems and ensure that future generations are not burdened with inadequate and unsafe infrastructure. If approached regionally, we could implement solutions that could drastically reduce future sewage overflows, be resilient to climate change and protect the health of our

communities and provide much-needed access to recreation and open space; and

WHEREAS: The city of Somerville and the city of Cambridge should not bear a disproportionate share of the cost to address a regional problem; and

WHEREAS: In April 2026, the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), the City of Cambridge, and the City of Somerville released a Draft Updated CSO Long-Term Control Plan (LTCP) for the Charles River, Alewife Brook, and Upper Mystic River basins. The final version of this LTCP will ultimately be submitted to the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office (MEPA) and the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MassDEP) for review and potential approval; and

WHEREAS: As currently proposed, the Draft Updated CSO Long-Term Control Plan puts forth recommendations that in the opinion of this Council are not resilient to our changing climate and will result in the continuation of a public health crisis; **NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT**

RESOLVED: That the Somerville City Council go on record urging the CSO Control Partners to continue to work to refine the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan to investigate a range of hybrid solutions at higher levels of control, including as much sewer separation and stormwater controls in upstream separated communities as possible, ensuring that Combined Sewer Overflows are a truly rare occurrence in the future, and push for virtual elimination of Combined Sewer Overflows through this Control Plan; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED: That the City of Somerville is hereby requested to advocate for broader funding across the state and entire MWRA region, and for additional federal funding; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED: That the Somerville's state legislative delegation is hereby requested to advocate for broader funding across the state and entire MWRA region, and for additional federal funding; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED: That the Somerville City Council calls on the MWRA to work with the regional municipalities along the affected waterways to ensure that the Final CSO Long-Term Control Plan (LTCP) for the Charles River, Alewife Brook, and Upper Mystic River puts forth recommendations that will achieve the highest level of control through modern infrastructure solutions and regional cooperation resulting in virtual elimination of CSO's; **AND BE IT FURTHER**

RESOLVED: That a copy of this Resolution be transmitted to the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority Board of Directors and Advisory Board, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection, the Environmental Protection Agency, the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act Office, the City of Cambridge, the Town of Arlington, the Boston City Council, Somerville's state legislative delegation, and Governor Healey.

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