

AN INTRO TO SWAP (JUST IN CASE YOU FORGOT)

By Steve Grimm

For the past several years I've been talking about the Safe Water Infrastructure Action Program, or SWAP. Even in the early, dark days of the pandemic I found opportunity to talk about it. For those of you who are new to our industry and never heard of SWAP or have just forgotten what it is, I offer this intro.

SWAP is a bill that has been introduced in the New York State Legislature for the past few years. The bill number has changed over the years, this year it is S3968A, but the language has remained basically the same. Most are familiar with the Consolidated Local Street and Highway Improvement Program, or CHIPS. CHIPS is a supplemental funding allotment given to municipalities for maintenance of their roads. In a nutshell, SWAP is CHIPS for water, sewer and stormwater infrastructure.

In 2018, it was estimated that our water, wastewater and stormwater infrastructure needs exceeded 50 million dollars. Issues such as Covid (why not? we blame it for everything else), supply chain issues, inflation and a disappearing workforce have only increased that cost. Grant programs such as the Water Grants, the Water Infrastructure Investment Act (WIIA), the massive infrastructure improvement program and others have been and will be very successful in addressing our aging infrastructure. These programs are designed to address capital projects, replacement and upgrading of critical infrastructure. They are competitive programs that often require engineering services and some municipal match. They also expire. These programs are essential tools for repairing and replacing our aging infrastructure. Unfortunately, these programs alone will not solve our infrastructure problems.

Insufficient O&M funding is a major contributor to our infrastructure issues. Years of keeping rates low, as well as deferring maintenance, repair and replacement of critical infrastructure because "we don't have the money" are just some of the reasons that have led to insufficient O&M funding.

There have been calls for a more permanent source of funding for our infrastructure, one that addresses and supports O&M activities. SWAP is designed to provide municipalities with water, sewer and storm water infrastructure, a supplemental funding stream to support operation and maintenance activities. Just like the CHIPS program, municipalities would know what their annual SWAP allotment would be. This would afford them the opportunity to perform maintenance and/or replacement activities above and beyond what was budgeted for. These would be smaller projects such as manhole rehabilitation or water line replacement and would not require engineering and the associated costs. The infrastructure to these communities would be constantly improving through the increased operation and maintenance funding. The long-term sustainability of the systems

would improve, rates could stabilize and remain affordable. SWAP monies could also be used in conjunction with a capital project, reducing the amount of outside funding needed for the project.

Those are the crib notes on SWAP. To learn more, search Bill Number S3968A on the New York State Senate website or simply go to https://www.nysenate.gov/search/legislation?searched=true&type=f_bill&bill_printno=S3968A&page=1. You can also find information on our website by going to <https://nyruralwater.org/downloads/downloads-other-materials>. Scroll towards the bottom of the page to SWAP - Legislative Campaign Documents. You can also contact me at 518-828-3155 ext. 180. Cheers!

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