

Winslow to add \$1 million to Chaffee Brook budget due to permits, labor shortage

cm centralmaine.com/2024/04/10/winslow-to-add-1m-to-chaffee-brook-budget-due-to-permits-labor-shortage

April 10, 2024

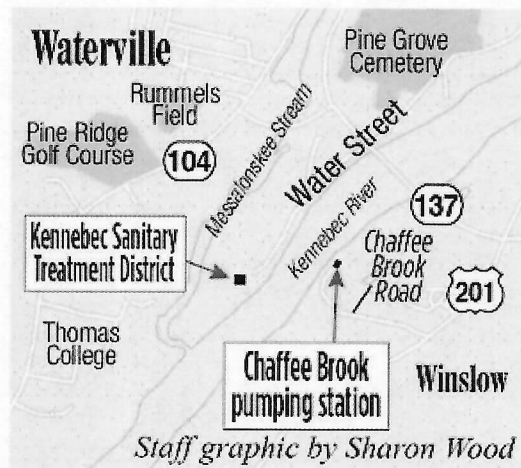


Winslow Public Works Director Paul Fongemie walks past 16-inch sewer line on Wednesday at the Chaffee Brook Pumping Station in Winslow. The pipe will replace the existing line that runs beneath the Kennebec River to Waterville's Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District. Fongemie said the removed pipe will be evaluated for possible reuse. *Rich Abrahamson/Morning Sentinel*

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WINSLOW — The long-delayed \$8 million sewer pump replacement project at Chaffee Brook will likely face another budget increase, officials confirmed Monday.

The Chaffee Brook Pump Station is a vital piece of Winslow's infrastructure, handling all of the town's untreated sewage before pumping it through a single pipe beneath the Kennebec River to Waterville's Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District. The pumping station was built in 1970 and, until work began to modernize the facility last November, it had not been updated since 1998.



The project will replace nearly every aspect of the station except for the building itself, but efforts were delayed after the station flooded during last year's Dec. 18 storm.

Winslow Public Works Director Paul Fongemie said at Monday's Town Council meeting that the project's engineers have raised their cost estimates by about \$1 million.

"We know we're going to have a cost increase," he said. "There's too much work out there, not enough contractors, there's no competition, and we're paying the price for it. It's not the news I want to deliver."

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To help alleviate the cost, applications for a number of state and federal grants have been filled out, Fongemie said, but they haven't been approved yet and likely won't be for at least a few weeks.

The project had been held up for months while the town secured new permits for its new timeline, but Town Manager Ella Bowman said at Monday's council meeting that the permitting process is now complete and the total cost is an additional \$18,900.

Officials have previously emphasized the importance of the project, citing both environmental and residential concerns. Fongemie said in October that were the pipe beneath the river to fail or the station to flood, millions of gallons of sewage could spill into the Kennebec, similar to a 2019 incident in Waterville.

The station experiences three or four overflow events annually, in which up to 300,000 gallons of mixed sewage spills into the Kennebec River during times of flooding or high rainfall. Sewage from the station was pumped directly into the Kennebec River before the passage of the Clean Water Act in 1972.



Winslow Public Works Director Paul Fongemie stands on the staging area for piping installation Wednesday at the Chaffee Brook Pumping Station in Winslow. When the project is complete the pipeline will carry sewage under the Kennebec River, from Winslow to Waterville's Kennebec Sanitary Treatment District. *Rich Abrahamson/Morning Sentinel*

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The job also has specific requirements stemming from the Chaffee Brook station's aging and outdated equipment. Only three contractors in the state of Maine could do the necessary work, according to Fongemie.

"There's only a couple companies that make some of this stuff, and they're not gonna give it away," he said. "I've taken everything out of that project that I can do in-house. I've taken all the earthwork out of that contract, I'm gonna do that here in-house with our guys and our crews to try to save as much as we can, but I can't do the mechanical part. I can't do pumps and electrical and all that stuff."

In October, before Bowman's appointment to town manager and half of the current councilors' elections, the Town Council voted unanimously to add about \$1.3 million to the project's budget, citing regulatory requirements, aging infrastructure and flooding concerns.

Bowman previously said in February that work will be pushed back into the fall due to the new permits. Fongemie said Monday he expects crews to be on site in October.