Somerset Needs Area Sewer Project: Frequently Asked Questions

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Why is the Town extending sewer service to this area?

The Somerset Needs Area was identified for sewer service in the Town's 2004 Comprehensive Wastewater Management Plan and its 2014 update because of concerns about the effects of septic systems on area ponds (Miacomet and Hummock) and groundwater. Pond water quality monitoring and other environmental reports have documented water quality problems. The possibility of 0% financing helped determine when to advance the project; it is not the reason the area was identified for sewer service. The Surfside Road pump station also had to be upgraded before it could accept flows from this extension.

If the Town does not obtain 0% financing, will the project stop?

No, not automatically. The 2026 Annual Town Meeting borrowing authorization for this project does not depend on a particular interest rate. If 0% financing is unavailable, the Town would decide whether to proceed with borrowing; that decision ultimately rests with the Select Board.

Is there a percentage increase in project cost that requires another Town Meeting vote?

There is no fixed percentage threshold in the Town Meeting approval that would require another Town Meeting vote. The relevant question is whether the approved appropriation is enough to pay for the project. If it is not, the Select Board would need to reduce the scope or seek additional funding from Town Meeting. Additional funding would require another Town Meeting and/or ballot vote.

Can the approved project be changed?

The Select Board could decide not to borrow the full authorized amount and/or could reduce the project's scope. Before the Town enters into construction contracts (likely to be in early 2027 prior to Town Meeting), a citizen-petitioned article could also be filed and, if approved by Town Meeting, reduce the appropriation. A proposed change to the sewer design would need engineering review and a decision by the Town; a change requiring costs beyond the approved appropriation would require additional funding approval.

Why do some properties need an individual grinder pump?

The proposed low-pressure sewer uses individual grinder pumps to move wastewater from certain properties into the collection system. The design takes account of the area's terrain and the cost and location of public infrastructure. The need for a grinder pump depends on the

planned sewer serving a particular property, not simply on the size of the project's main pump station.

Was a smaller neighborhood pump station considered?

Yes. The Sewer Master Plan considered small neighborhood pump stations, and the option was reviewed again during preliminary design for Somerset. For this neighborhood, the engineers concluded that individual grinder pumps and a low-pressure sewer are the most cost-effective approach. A separate neighborhood station would also require a suitable site and larger, deeper gravity sewers. The engineers estimate that adding one would increase project costs by close to $2 million, excluding the cost of acquiring a site. Those costs are not included in the approved appropriation.

The project's main pump station is a different facility. It is planned for a low-elevation parcel purchased by the Town and is sized for Somerset and anticipated future flows from the Hummock North and Hummock South Needs Areas. Making that station smaller would not change whether an individual property needs a grinder pump.

Have grinder pumps had a history of failures on Nantucket?

The Sewer Department reports a limited number of failures in existing Nantucket installations, including areas of Shimmo and Monomoy. Pumps that failed while under warranty were replaced. Like other mechanical equipment, pumps can fail and must be used properly; grease, wipes, excessive sand, and paint can cause problems. The Town anticipates using pump procurement standards similar to those used for the prior Shimmo-area project and will provide residents with operating guidance.

What happens during a power outage? Could wastewater immediately back up if someone is showering?

A grinder pump needs electricity to run, but its tank provides temporary storage when power is out. Town staff estimate about 48 hours of wastewater storage capacity; the time available depends on how much water the household uses. A brief outage should not cause an immediate backup, but residents should minimize water use until power returns. Continued water use after the tank fills could cause a backup. A properly configured generator can provide backup power to the pump. The Town plans to distribute more detailed operating and outage guidance before connections are made.

Will a grinder pump necessarily cost more than a gravity connection?

The pump and any needed electrical work add costs, but the pipe from a property to a low-pressure sewer can cost less to install than a gravity connection. Actual costs depend on the property and its layout. The Town cannot give a single cost comparison that applies to every home. Once the project moves forward to construction, the Town will coordinate with grinder pump manufacturers to supply the grinder pump systems. Once a manufacturer is selected, the

Town will pre-purchase the units and property owners that require a grinder pump will be notified of the process to obtain the units once the sewer connection permit application has been approved. Property owners will not be permitted to install grinder pumps that are not approved by the Town.

Does a recently installed septic system exempt a property from connecting?

No automatic exemption follows from having a new septic system. The purpose of extending sewer service includes reducing wastewater impacts on groundwater and nearby ponds, which a functioning septic system does not eliminate. A property owner may ask the Board of Health about a waiver, exemption, or extension of a connection requirement. The Board would consider the request under the applicable rules; the Town cannot promise an exemption for any particular property.

How can residents ask questions about their properties?

The Town plans a public information session in fall 2026 when the design is further developed. The project team is also considering smaller meetings and a session focused on Board of Health connection requirements. Dates and details will be announced when confirmed. Residents may contact the Town's Sewer Department with property-specific design and connection questions.