

## **The Wall Street Journal**

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### **EPA Sewer Mandates, Flexibility and Value for Money- Letter to the Editor**

I must disagree with your Oct. 23 editorial "[The Obama Storm Tax](#)." Philadelphia's recent experiences working with the EPA have resulted in a smart, integrated approach to urban water sustainability. The EPA understands that the path to clean water is through collaboration and partnership and by investing limited resources wisely. The EPA under President Obama has in fact been a refreshing change for America's mayors who had overpriced storm-water solutions dictated to them for decades.

This past April the EPA and the city of Philadelphia signed the Green City Clean Waters Partnership Agreement. This historic agreement recognizes Philadelphia's innovative green infrastructure approach to storm-water management as the best means to reduce water pollution from combined sewers. Our agreement established a unique federal-city partnership to oversee our regulatory compliance and will serve as a model for cities embracing green infrastructure.

Green storm-water infrastructure captures rainwater on the surface and allows it to soak into the ground—transforming streets, parking lots, schools and public spaces into urban landscapes that reduce sewer overflows to our waterways and enhancing our communities. Philadelphia is investing \$2.4 billion—a cost based on what our citizens can afford—over the next 25 years to make our waterways cherished and thriving destinations. Our investments are structured to provide health, economic and social benefits to transform Philadelphia into a truly sustainable city.

Philadelphia isn't alone in working with the EPA to implement green infrastructure. The EPA has amended agreements with cities across America to include green infrastructure and is working with other cities on partnership agreements similar to Philadelphia's. I would call that visionary.

Mayor Michael A. Nutter  
Philadelphia

Mayor Nutter is president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors.

George Hawkins, general manager of the Washington, D.C. water system, is quoted in support of the idea that the current regulatory structure is driving ever larger investments of public funds to achieve diminishing improvements to water quality. Mr. Hawkins noted in his testimony, for example, that it costs 350 times more today to remove the next pound of nutrients than it did in 1980. Yet D.C. Water is under a court-ordered consent decree to build a \$2.6 billion tunnel system—with average monthly water and sewer bills set to rise over \$100 as a result—at the behest of an EPA and Justice Department that reported to the previous president, not the current one.

By contrast, the EPA today is discussing with DC Water green pilot programs that could reduce the reliance on costly and invisible tunnels. Such a discussion would not have been possible under the prior administration due to technology, public interest and political will. Although it remains to be seen whether the EPA's new policy on integrated permitting will offer the flexibility we need to continue improving water quality while spending our money more wisely, the

flexibility that the agency has demonstrated with cities like Philadelphia and Atlanta is very promising.

William M. Walker  
Chairman  
D.C. Water  
Washington

Discharge requirements are now so high that in many cities the clean tap water that met yesterday's standards will fail the new federal requirement for sewer-plant discharge. The cost of upgrading a plant can jump astronomically just to assure that no two-hour overflow could be probable during one storm in any 10-year period.

There is no assurance that these new plants will be able to meet the requirements in the next federal bill.

Robert O. Watkins  
Ridgefield, Wash.

Your editorial fails to touch on the possible loss of jobs by cities affected by the EPA order to stop overflows.

Omaha, Neb., where we lived for many years, has been threatened with the loss of several companies if the city does not find a way to reduce the greatly increased sewage fees required to pay for the EPA-mandated separation of wastewater and storm-water systems. The only way to reduce their costs would be to pass them on to the home owner, which politically is not something the mayor wants to do. Does the mayor keep the proposed fees in place to keep the voters happy and drive jobs out of town, or lower the fees for manufacturers and keep the jobs but be voted out of office at the next election?

I suspect other cities are facing the same issues.

Thomas R. Lammers  
Maynardville, Tenn.

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