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Federal funding approved for wastewater treatment facility

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Last week, Warwick Sewer Authority (WSA) executive director Janine Burke and I joined with our congressional delegation, the governor, and the Rhode Island Management Agency to announce that the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has approved federal funding for improvements at the WSA's wastewater treatment facility.

The \$3.6 million allocation will cover approximately 90% of the cost to raise the levee surrounding the property to the 500-year flood level with a two-foot safety factor, install a drain system to keep groundwater below the inside portion of the levee and modify the existing storm drain system. The city will save \$600,000 on construction costs thanks to a provision that reduces to 10% the non-federal share for some FEMA assistance.

These improvements follow the historic floods of 2010, which decimated the facility when the Pawtuxet River breached the levee, submerged the property, caused a power outage and shut down the facility and six pumping stations. While the WSA - which treats an average of five million gallons per day - was able to process wastewater within a week, it took several months before it was back at full operational capacity. All told, the flood caused roughly \$14 million in damage - about half of that in electrical costs.

We always understood the importance of our wastewater treatment facility to protect public health and the environment, but the flood underscored how critical this infrastructure is. The improvements will address past vulnerabilities at the treatment facility and help to ensure that the system can remain operational should another catastrophe occur - protecting our residents and business community alike from disruption. Director Burke and I look forward to an official groundbreaking in several weeks with all of the elected officials, and local, state, and federal agencies that helped to make this vitally important funding come to fruition.

Scott Avedisian is the mayor of Warwick and the chairman of the RIPTA board of directors.

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