Municipalities Play Critical Role in Ensuring Sustainable Water System

Spotlight: Princeton Municipal Water Story

Each municipality in New Jersey has its own individual water story and often it is complicated. Shaped by its geography, services and local concerns, each municipality operates under its own water governance. Understanding the particular water situation in the community is key to finding solutions for water improvement.

The [Municipal Water Story](#) action is one of the two mandatory Sustainable Jersey actions required to attain the [Gold Star Standard in Water](#). The goal of the action is for a municipality to define and prioritize their local water challenges. To do this a municipality will undertake a data collection process to create a narrative that describes how water moves through the community in all its forms – drinking, waste, stormwater and as a natural resource.

Princeton took the first step to create a municipal water story video and report. Donna Liu, a Sustainable Princeton volunteer and recent graduate of the Rutgers Environmental Steward program, developed the Princeton Water Story as her internship project. Liu approached the task from her perspective as a long-time resident unaware of her town's water story. Liu explained, "Many people take tap water for granted, and many users don't know where, geographically, their drinking water comes from, nor what it goes through to become potable." She credits a wide range of experts in the field of water and environmental studies on the Water Gold Task Force and at the Rutgers Environmental Steward program for sharing resources and providing guidance to develop the municipal water story.

Liu said, "The goal is to help Princeton residents understand where water comes from, what happens to is as it travels through town and where it goes." Jenny Ludmer of Sustainable Princeton added, "The Princeton Water Story is a valuable resource and a first step as we work to achieve the Gold Star Standard in Water. We will use the water story as a catalyst for a wider discussion in our community to formulate an overall water strategy."

Municipalities are charged with sharing the data-driven information from the water story in a way that allows local participants to react to the facts, but also enhances the story with information that provides a fuller picture. For example, the data gathered about stormwater may highlight that one section of a municipality has lots of paving – streets, sidewalks, parking lots—that together contribute to an area with a high percentage of impervious cover. Resident input may identify that streets in this

highly-paved area are often flooded during significant rain events and, when the storms are intense, they can find water flooding into their basements.

Liu said "The idea of approaching water from a storytelling angle resonated with me. In New Jersey all of our natural waters are considered a public trust resource. We all own it; we all use it and we should all protect it." Engaging local residents to share their stories adds a new dimension to the narrative that is important for developing a deep understanding of water issues and building support for the development of comprehensive long-term solutions. Sharing stories–from local flooding hazards to favorite fishing spots—is a way for municipal participants to state their concerns and potentially discover common values about their local water system.

Princeton's Water Story is available on the Environmental Commission Resources page of the www.princetonnj.gov website and here: https://youtu.be/SswRYGlzG5Y.