

DATE: March 22, 2021

MEMO: Launching an *Adopt A Storm Drain* program

TO: MS4 Subcommittee

FROM: Kristen Balschunat, Rethink Runoff Program Manager
Chelsea Mandigo, MS4 Subcommittee Co-Chair
Annie Costandi P.E, MS4 Subcommittee Co-Chair

Hello Rethink Runoff Municipal Members,

As discussed at the March 3rd MS4 subcommittee meeting, we are proposing that Rethink Runoff partner with [Adopt a Storm Drain](#) to launch a "Drain Defenders" initiative in our nine towns. **The goal is to engage community members by matching them with storm drains that they agree to visit and clear every two weeks.** We hope all 9 municipalities will consider participating so we can offer a strong "launch" year throughout the RRST service area with plenty of staff support from the RRST Program Manager. Below you will find more details about our current understanding of the program. For an introduction to the *Adopt a Drain* Program, watch this 10-minute video.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s2fl_BaQwTw&feature=emb_logo. For additional information including examples of reports and outreach materials, see attachments posted in the March MS4 meeting file at the [CCRPC](#).

Please review this memo in detail and reply to Kristen Balschunat (kristen@winooskinrcd.org) with answers to the following questions by Monday, March 29 at 4:00pm

Would your municipality like to participate in the Drain Defenders program?

If so, which funding options would be feasible? (see scenarios listed below)

Do you have specific questions for the Adopt a Storm Drain Team at Hamline?

Would you want to participate in a Zoom call with Tracy and Jenni from the Adopt a Storm Drain Program later this month so they can answer your questions directly?

ESTIMATED COSTS

Annual Subscription: The annual subscription fee for each municipality is \$0.05 per capita based on your total population. (E.G. if your population is 10,000 then the subscription fee would be \$500). This fee would be paid by each municipality as a separate expense from MS4 Rethink Runoff dues.

Setup Fees: The cost of setting up the program includes creating a separate landing page for Vermont, uploading GIS data for each municipality and customizing welcome packet materials and lawn signs with Lake-Champlain-specific messaging. This was originally quoted at \$800 per municipality but if we apply as a single “region” rather than as separate municipalities they will decrease the cost and charge a one-time setup fee of \$2,500.

Printed Welcome Packet & Lawn Signs: When participants sign up to adopt a drain they automatically receive a welcome email with detailed instructions. There is also an option to send a physical packet which includes a welcome letter and a plastic lawn sign which plays into the social marketing strategy. The cost for that packet to be mailed automatically by the Adopt A Storm Drain team is \$10.10 per packet. The cost to purchase the signs separately is \$2.15 each (we would then use staff time to address packages, and drop off each package and would be responsible for postage).

PAYMENT SCENARIOS

1. **Full Cost** Each municipality pays for all associated fees in their community and the Rethink Runoff coordinator helps with outreach and program launch throughout 2021.
2. **Partial Offset of Setup** Each municipality pays for their annual subscription fee and the cost of Printed Welcome Packet and Lawn Signs (if they choose to mail physical packets) but the \$2,500 allocated for “Materials” in the Rethink Runoff MM2 budget is used to offset setup costs. The Rethink Runoff coordinator helps with outreach and program launch throughout 2021.
3. **Total Offset of Setup** Each municipality pays for their annual subscription fee and the cost of Printed Welcome Packet and Lawn Signs (if they choose to mail physical packets) but part of the \$13,000 surplus used to offset all setup costs. The Rethink Runoff coordinator helps with outreach and program launch throughout 2021.
4. **Offset of Setup and Printed Materials** Each municipality pays for their annual subscription fee. The ~estimated ~\$13,000 surplus in our operating funds is used to offset all setup costs and is used to offset the cost of Printed Welcome Packet and Lawn Signs for the first year. The Rethink Runoff coordinator helps with outreach and program launch throughout 2021. After the first “launch” year each municipality would choose whether to continue sending printed materials to volunteers and would incur that cost separately from Rethink Runoff. The Rethink Runoff Program Manager and Co-Chairs strongly support this option and urge you to consider the benefits of launching a strong region-wide program using these funds, especially in a year with continued limited in-person volunteer opportunities.

FAQs:

1. What are the benefits of running a Drain Defenders program in the first place?

a. We believe launching an adopt-a-drain program is a great fit for all MS4 communities in a year that will still be impacted by COVID restrictions. We anticipate that this program will engage hundreds of community volunteers in a project that can be completed without any in-person interaction. Adopting a storm drain is a small and simple action that may inspire community members to participate in other Rethink Runoff activities in the years to come. Our goal is to build engagement and grow our audience.

2. What are the benefits of purchasing the platform and program provided by Adopt A Storm Drain specifically?

a. Adopt a Storm Drain was developed by staff at Hamline University using research on best practices for community engagement and after interviewing many groups around the country that run adopt-a-drain programs. Their interface is professional, supported by tech-savvy staff and makes it very easy for volunteers to sign up. It also was developed with MS4 Permit requirements in mind especially MM1 and MM2. Reports can be developed on a sub-watershed basis, so you can track how many pounds of leaves, sand and other debris were removed by volunteers in each subwatershed.

3. Would this program be cheaper if we created it “in-house”?

a. No. Based on the experience of the City of Burlington struggling to develop an easy-to-use web-mapping interface for a similar program and the experience of the Village of Essex Junction beginning to plan for an “in-house” program we think that costs will be lower with Adopt-a-Storm-Drain. Our early conception of an “in-house” program was that municipal staff in each interested community would create a GIS map of available drains to post on their own website and volunteers would email the MS4 rep if they were interested in adopting a drain. Municipal staff would be responsible for manually updating the map of available drains as volunteers signed up. We planned to use Google Forms to track hours and measure lbs. of trash removed. In this conception, the Rethink Runoff program manager was going to help “launch” the program for the first year with significant community outreach and then municipal staff would be fully responsible for running the program in the future. This process is less user friendly and requires a significant amount of staff time.

4. What tasks would municipal staff be responsible for completing if we use Adopt a Drain platform?

a. Provide up-to-date GIS data about storm drains that are available (and safe) for volunteers to adopt. That’s it! Rethink Runoff will coordinate with Adopt a Storm Drain and will complete

outreach (via the newsletter, social media, FPF, etc.) to build interest in your community. Creating “buzz” around the program in the first year would be a significant portion of the Rethink Runoff coordinator’s tasks and we could provide ongoing support in the realm of outreach. In the following years Rethink Runoff will help to coordinate some outreach and will still serve as the main point of contact between Adopt a Storm Drain and each municipality. This initiative would be branded with Rethink Runoff rather than being branded as a stand-alone municipal program.