

Draft Testimony for the Senate Majority Policy Committee Hearing on Inner Ring Suburbs

July 21, 2011

Good afternoon Chairman Erickson and members of the Senate Majority Policy Committee. My name is Paula Conolly and I am a policy specialist supporting the Philadelphia Water Department. I am honored to be here today to testify on behalf of the City of Philadelphia.

Here in Southeastern Pennsylvania, as well as throughout the country, we are experiencing a time of great urgency in managing our water resources. Old problems, such as sewer overflows, aging infrastructure systems and frequent droughts and floods combine with new threats such as climate change to demand swift and long-term solutions.

In Philadelphia, our "Green City, Clean Waters" program addresses these challenges through green infrastructure, an approach that will protect our drinking water sources while revitalizing our streams, creeks, and rivers. We believe that the "Green City, Clean Waters" program can serve as a model to other suburban and urbanized areas to fulfill necessary infrastructure upgrades and meet water quality mandates while providing numerous long-term benefits to our communities and the natural environment.

Through a recent agreement with the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection, the Philadelphia Water Department has committed to invest approximately \$2.4 billion over the next 25 years to significantly reduce Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) – a combination of sewage and stormwater that overflows into our rivers and streams when it rains.

Green infrastructure systems, including green roofs, rain gardens, stormwater wetlands and porous pavement, collect and retain stormwater, allowing it to permeate the soil and flow back to the groundwater aquifer, rather than running off into our storm sewers, rivers and streams. Instead of expanding our underground systems of storage tanks and tunnels, we will reduce the amount of stormwater that enters our sewer system in the first place. Every impervious acre of land that is greened through these projects will reduce the city's stormwater runoff by roughly 1 million gallons of water per year. At the conclusion of our program, green stormwater infrastructure combined with an increase in sewage treatment plant capacity will reduce Philadelphia's annual sewer overflows by nearly 8 billion gallons.

In addition to managing stormwater and restoring our urban waterways, the "Green City, Clean Waters" plan will provide numerous other benefits to our city, including green jobs creation, an increase in recreational space in our neighborhoods and waterfronts, a reduction of up to 1.5 billion pounds of carbon dioxide annually and a visible improvement to our neighborhoods via green streets, plantings and parks. New

green space increases property values of adjacent homes, reduces summertime heat-related fatalities and reduces air pollution and asthma cases.

The City's green infrastructure initiative will also leverage a match from private development. Similar to other areas in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia's stormwater regulations require all new development and redevelopment that disturbs more than 15,000 square feet of earth to manage the first inch of runoff from impervious surfaces. As a result of these regulations, private redevelopment and investment will significantly decrease the necessary amount of public investment to achieve water quality goals. Furthermore, Philadelphia's stormwater program is unique in that we have instituted a "cost of service" stormwater charge based on the size of properties' gross area and impervious area. Non-residential customers can reduce their stormwater fees by implementing green infrastructure to manage stormwater on-site. As such, utility customers can reap the benefits of greening their own properties while helping to meet citywide CSO goals.

Our green infrastructure program is a continuation of the Philadelphia Water Department's long-standing commitment to watershed protection, much of which has been achieved in partnership with our suburban neighbors. The Darby-Cobbs Watershed Partnership, for instance, is one of seven collaboratives created by the water department to address water resource challenges using a watershed approach. This Partnership serves the Darby-Cobbs watershed, which covers 77 square miles in 31 municipalities in the counties of Chester, Delaware, Montgomery and Philadelphia, including where we are today in Upper Darby.

The Darby-Cobbs Watershed Partnership is a consortium of stakeholders from municipal governments, community and environmental organizations, local schools and regulatory agencies. These groups recognize the Darby and Cobbs Creeks as shared resources and are working together to restore them as vital habitat and attractive recreational destinations. The partnership coordinates clean ups, trail maintenance work, races and other activities that bring the community into the riparian parks and introduce them to the creeks, so that they too can help achieve the vision of a restored water resource.

With the completion of the Cobbs Creek Integrated Watershed Management Plan in 2004 and an initial 20-year commitment of \$16 million in 2006 to rehabilitate stream habitat and meet water quality goals, the water department had already expressed a priority commitment to the watershed. Through the "Green City, Clean Waters" program, PWD's initial commitment to the watershed has now been significantly increased.

The Darby-Cobbs Watershed Partnership, with its solid history of demonstration project implementation, has been one of our most successful initiatives. However, much remains to be done. Support in the form of increased participation and funding is needed to sustain the Partnership's many initiatives.

As stormwater regulations grow more rigorous and development continues to expand, inner ring suburbs and municipalities across the state will be compelled to undertake greater efforts to manage their stormwater and protect their waterways. Green infrastructure and watershed partnerships are two tools that are currently being demonstrated and established as efficient methods of protecting and improving water quality in the City of Philadelphia. These same tools will no doubt prove useful to our suburban neighbors, as you face future challenges of water resources management.

Going forward, it is essential for local and state policies to encourage and support these solutions. Policy makers must recognize that stormwater solutions can and should address more than a simple reduction in intermittent pollutant loads. Instead, they can be structured to improve air quality, aquatic habitat, human health and the urban living environment. Current regulatory practices still favor hard, grey, single-goal oriented infrastructure. New regulations are needed that better align with green infrastructure. Policies that support watershed permitting to institutionalize the regional planning efforts of watershed partnerships are also critical. Finally, funding is needed to give inner ring suburbs and urbanized areas that have suffered from a decline in their tax base the opportunity to invest in these long-term improvements to water quality.

While the challenges of water resource management in urban areas in the 21st century are many, the toolbox available to municipalities is growing and improving at a rapid pace. In the City of Philadelphia, we are pushing the boundaries of traditional water management to create long-term investments that address multiple municipal concerns. We encourage our suburban neighbors and communities throughout the state to join us in this effort.

Thank you.