

NY Assembly delivers \$10 million gift for Syracuse's water pipes, roads



Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli and Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner announce on Wednesday, July 22, 2015 that the state Assembly will give Syracuse \$10 million to fix its water pipes and roads. *(Dennis Nett | dnett@syracuse.com)*



By [Teri Weaver | tweaver@nyup.com](#)

[Email the author](#) | [Follow on Twitter](#)

on July 22, 2015 at 12:43 PM, updated November 12, 2015 at 1:16 PM

SYRACUSE, N.Y. - The city will get \$10 million from the New York State Assembly this year to jump start Syracuse's efforts to fix its crumbling water system, Assemblyman Bill Magnarelli, D-Syracuse, said today.

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner plans to use the new state grant to qualify for other public money available for water and road projects. Ultimately, she wants to take that larger pot of money to Wall Street as collateral to borrow much more to launch a robust plan to rebuild the city's water pipes.

Miner said she does not expect the work to begin this year because the city will be seeking more money and studying data to decide where to do the repairs.

That \$10 million is just a drop in the bucket when it comes to fixing Syracuse's water problems. Last year, Miner estimated **it would cost \$726 million** to replace the 550 miles of aging water mains below the city's surface.

But Miner plans to take this new \$10 million and use it to apply for more public money and borrow more private money.

If Miner's strategy works, Syracuse could have access to tens of millions of dollars to make substantial improvements in a system that has seen one to two water main breaks per day for the past two years.

"The financial part of this plan is as important as where we're going to dig," Miner said today.

WATER MAIN BREAKS

[Miner: Syracuse water main breaks decline 18 percent, but city needs federal aid](#)

[Huge water main breaks in Troy on Sunday, crews get MLK Day off](#)

[How did engineers grade NY roads, bridges, sewers? \(Hide the report card\)](#)

[Syracuse city block shut down due to second water main break](#)

[Grant a good start for Syracuse water pipe repairs, but there's more to do \(Editorial\)](#)

All Stories

The money was awarded by Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, D-Bronx, and comes from a \$1.1 billion fund in the state budget earmarked for municipal projects, according to Magnarelli. He learned that Syracuse would get the \$10 million about two months ago, he said.

Miner said she plans to take this \$10 million and explore:

- How Syracuse could use that money for matching grants or loans available through the state and federal government
- How Syracuse could use new technology - like machines that go through water pipes to predict future breaks - to prioritize repair work
- How Syracuse can use data analysis to link projects to get the most bang for its buck. Ideally, that would mean the city would cross-reference faulty water mains with needed street repairs with expected private and public construction so that crews only dig up the roads once.

ADVERTISING

"We're going to have our innovation team of experts to determine where we can most efficiently use that money," Miner said, adding that she wants to use a "dig-once policy" to spend the money most efficiently.

Of the \$10 million, \$2.5 million is earmarked for road repairs, \$6.7 million for water system repairs, and \$800,000 for research to plan the overall project.

Miner said she does not expect any construction from this new money to happen this year. She does expect to develop the overall financial plan and strategy by this fall. Part of the financial plan could rely on city water users to help pay back borrowing, she said today.

The state money is coming from the State and Municipal Facility Program, which is also known as SAM. The fund was created three years ago by New York's political leaders, according to the Empire Center, a conservative budget watchdog group in Albany. The governor, the Senate majority leader and the Assembly speaker each have access to about one-third of that \$1.1 billion to award to public projects, according to Ken Girardin, of the Empire Center.

So far, the state has approved spending about \$97 million from the fund. The money is ultimately borrowed through the Dormitory Authority for the individual projects, Girardin said.

Girardin applauded Miner's approach to leverage Syracuse's \$10 million into a much larger pot of public and borrowed money.

But he **also criticized the state's creation of SAM**, which allows state leaders to dole out money without ample transparency that state taxpayers pay back, with interest.

The Empire Center asked the state's Dormitory Authority three months ago for a list of the projects approved through the fund. So far, the authority hasn't provided the information, he said today.

"That's the concerning part," he said.

A call to the authority was not immediately returned today.

Magnarelli said today he doesn't believe the Assembly's award goes counter to comments made earlier this year by Gov. Andrew Cuomo about Syracuse's water woes. In February, Cuomo challenged Syracuse to grow its local economy **to fix its own pipes**.

"I don't think this contradicts what the governor said," Magnarelli said. "We've heard a lot of negative things about our infrastructure. (It's) all true. They all need to be corrected. But what we haven't heard is government is listening and starting to do something about it."

Magnarelli said he believes this \$10 million will be the start of that.

Contact Teri Weaver anytime: [Email](#) | [Twitter](#) | 315-470-2274

Registration on or use of this site constitutes acceptance of our **User Agreement** and **Privacy Policy**

© 2017 Advance Media New York. All rights reserved (**About Us**).

The material on this site may not be reproduced, distributed, transmitted, cached or otherwise used, except with the prior written permission of Advance Media New York.

Community Rules apply to all content you upload or otherwise submit to this site.

 **Ad Choices**