

Vergennes Water & Waste Infrastructure, Earth Day – 4/21/22

\$17.5M WEP

[Salutation]

Good afternoon, and thank you all for being here today. I am the State Director for USDA Rural Development, and my name is Sarah Waring. Our agency's mission is to increase economic opportunity and improve the quality of life in rural America. Today, my colleagues and I are here to celebrate water and its vital importance to Vergennes, and to all our rural communities. Tomorrow is Earth Day – when across our globe we take action to protect, sustain and steward the precious natural resources we have. And today I'm thrilled to be here in Vergennes; a community that is clearly and boldly investing in our planet and their children's future.

We know that clean water is a necessity for people, for communities, for the ecosystems that surround us—for LIFE itself! Whether it's in a time of disaster and emergency, or to ensure efficient sanitation and good overall public health, the value of water cannot be calculated, nor can it be underestimated. For all rural communities—including little cities!—developing a reliable, modern wastewater treatment plant and updating aging infrastructure will advance development goals, reduce environmental impacts and ensure a better quality of life for generations.

Our partners in public works who manage wastewater treatment plants know it's time to get serious about climate change. Utilities are under pressure to deliver more with less, especially when it comes to energy use and greenhouse gas emissions. The goal is to go carbon neutral or even energy positive. And these facilities must also battle the climate change that is already underway, including dry spells in some regions and flooding in others.

In our agency, we believe that clean drinking water and basic sanitation should be available for all rural communities, but we also believe that it shouldn't come at the cost of the environment, or that community's growth and development. On the ground today, we are seeing the next chapter for Vergennes, where they get to do exactly that. But this project is special because city leaders here saw the change to navigate state and federal funding, and make it work. Today, with American Rescue Plan funds, Bipartisan Infrastructure funds, and state funding, it's an unprecedented moment in time for our communities. The local champions here, from elected officials to residents, and that includes our youngest residents, knew they had to bring in as much external funding as possible to fix and upgrade a failing system. When the bond vote passed, it was an historic moment that signaled to all funders how committed this community is to the right kind of change. Now, Vergennes has over \$17 and a half million dollars of USDA RD funding dedicated to this project.

Tomorrow, USDA is announcing nearly \$800 million in 244 critical rural infrastructure projects to strengthen the health and livelihoods of people facing climate change

impacts. USDA is making the investments under the [Water and Waste Disposal Loan and Grant Program](#), the [Community Facilities Disaster Loans and Grants](#) program, the [Rural Energy for America Program](#) and the [Electric Loan Program](#).

And it won't stop there. The Biden-Harris Administration has a laser focus on infrastructure that includes:

Funding for high-speed internet to every home and business, and making high-speed internet more affordable so that rural communities can stay connected to jobs, precision agriculture, telemedicine, and distance learning;

Upgrading electric and transmission infrastructure to improve resilience, affordability, and availability of energy;

Increasing access to high-quality education and health care services for rural residents, no matter where they live; and

Funding for safe roads and bridges, increasing access to transit systems to connect rural communities to more economic opportunity and move product more expeditiously around the country and around the world.

On Tuesday, President Biden was in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, to drive home the Administration's commitment to building this country back better. Highlighted was an \$18.2 million project completed earlier this month to widen the harbor's turning basin by our friends at the US Army Corps of Engineers.

This project for Vergennes is new infrastructure. We expect to see many more millions in new or upgraded infrastructure going in all over the state, in many ways in this coming year.

Today, we're proud to celebrate Earth Day with you, with Senator Leahy and Senator Sander's offices, with the Agency of Natural Resources and the Dept of Environmental Conservation, with the EPA and the Army Corps of Engineers, and with Representatives Lanpher and Birong, and the kids from Vergennes High School green team.

We are all here because of this locally driven solution; because we are ready to build back stronger, and more equitably, than ever before.

[Handoff]