

Sherman Street Tank

Updated September 8, 2026

We understand there are a lot of questions related to the Sherman Street Tank site. This document serves to help answer those questions. This is a living document and will be updated regularly. Please sign up for project updates at: camb.ma/shermanstreetfacility

THE TANK

What is being built at 135 Sherman Street?

A 2.1-million-gallon underground tank that, during heavy, intense rain, temporarily holds combined sewer overflow (CSO), which is stormwater mixed with sewage during heavy. A potential Department of Public Works (DPW) facility is also being proposed for this site as a future phase of development.

What will the tank hold?

This tank will normally be empty, but during intense rain, it will temporarily hold excess stormwater and sewage that otherwise would flow to the Alewife Brook, known as combined sewer overflow (CSO).

Why was this site chosen?

The DPW purchased this site in August 2023 for future municipal use. The site is very close to the City's existing CAM401A CSO regulator, where an underground storage tank can capture overflow most effectively, and meets a long-standing need for a DPW facility. To capture the combined stormwater and sewer on a different site, the City would need to build a complex and more expensive network of pipes and install a larger tank. Separate from this project, the City's Draft Updated CSO Control Plan is proposing more solutions in other locations, including additional tanks and sewer separation.

How serious is the overflow problem at CAM401A, and how will this tank help?

The outfall that experiences the most frequent CSOs in Cambridge is CAM401A, which released approximately 67 million gallons of combined stormwater and sewage into the Alewife Brook from 2020 to 2025. This tank will eliminate CSOs in an average rain year of the future and significantly reduce CSOs discharged into Alewife Brook for large future rain events.

Why a tank instead of full sewer separation?

Separation of the CAM401A combined sewer area is a complex, long, and more costly project that will also rely on tanks to achieve the same results as this proposed 2.1 MG tank will. Based on a very preliminary analysis, sewer separation will cost roughly \$400 million; take about 20 years; require digging up and rebuilding many streets; and still require a large stormwater storage facility because of floodplain limits in the Alewife Brook. Sewer separation may also require a pump station to move sanitary sewer to the treatment plant. This proposed CSO storage tank reduces overflows sooner and at far lower cost while sewer separation projects continue throughout the City. The advantages and disadvantages of full sewer separation are included in the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan, Section 9, available here:

<https://voice.somervillema.gov/19901/widgets/115506/documents/80799>

What happens when we have storms and where will the water go?

During regular storms, the combined sewer will continue to flow into the existing pipes and into the MWRA system, all the way to Deer Island for treatment. When the MWRA system is at capacity, the combined sewer will start flowing into the tank, where it will be temporarily the storm is over and then pumped back into the system for treatment at Deer Island. In situations where the tank fills up completely, like storms larger than 3 inches of rain in 24 hours, the excess combined stormwater and sewage will overflow the CAM401A regulator and discharge into the Alewife Brook as it does today.

How long will the tank hold combined stormwater and sewage?

The tank will hold flow for about 24 to 48 hours and will begin pumping it out after the storm ends.

How long does it take for the tank to be emptied after it starts operating?

The pumps will empty the tank within 24 hours of turning on.

How will the tank be maintained?

The tank will contain an internal flushing system that operates automatically after the tank empties. This will function each time the tank is used. There will also be routine maintenance to vacuum out larger materials and maintain the tank equipment.

Is there any danger of tank rupture once it is built? Is there a risk that we would see sewage coming out of this tank?

No, there is no danger of tank rupture. No, there is no risk of sewage coming out of this tank because the tank is designed to overflow, or discharge, into the Alewife Brook through the existing CAM401A CSO regulator if there is a storm so large that the tank exceeds capacity.

What is the lifespan of this tank?

Well beyond 50 years. The structural and geotechnical design is being done by professional engineers who specialize in these types of tanks and have a proven track record of performance.

Is this tank big enough?

The tank is the optimal size for our CSO needs and the size of the parcel.

Why not build the tank at Danehy Park or St. Peter's Field?

Danehy Park is a capped landfill, meaning it is fully closed with a multi-layer cover to prevent anything from coming in or out of the site. State regulations do not allow digging at this site. St. Peter's Field is designated open space, which limits the development activities that can happen there. Additionally, the field is far enough from the CAM401A regulator that a tank there would require significantly more infrastructure.

What is the site's distance to the nearest abutter?

The two closest buildings to the project site are located across the street at 131 Sherman St. and 54 Bellis Circle, which are both about 33 feet away.

CITYWIDE CSO PLANNING

Will other investments be made, in addition to the Sherman Street Tank, to benefit Alewife CSO discharges?

The proposed projects in the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan will eliminate CSOs from the Alewife Brook's outfalls for storm events in the 2050 Typical Year. To read the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan and to learn more about what a typical year is, visit

<https://voice.somervillema.gov/joint-cso-planning>, Section 6.

Will MWRA offer financial support for this project or full sewer separation?

The City is currently negotiating cost sharing for this project and the other Draft Updated CSO Control Plan projects. MWRA has been a financial partner in the last 20 years of CSO work in the Alewife Brook.

Is the Sherman Street Tank replacing sewer separation, or is the City giving up on sewer separation?

No. The City remains committed to its long-term sewer separation program. The Sherman Street Tank is a complementary near-term solution that will significantly reduce combined sewer overflows (CSOs) at CAM401A much sooner than sewer separation alone. Sewer separation within the approximately 192-acre drainage area is expected to take more than 20 years and cost more than \$400 million. As sewer separation advances, the tank can be repurposed to provide stormwater storage, continuing to serve an important role in managing runoff and reducing flooding.

Why build a tank now instead of waiting for sewer separation?

The City wants to reduce CSOs to our most active outfall as soon as possible. While sewer separation is expected to continue in the future, it will take decades to fully complete in this area. Constructing the Sherman Street Tank now provides meaningful CSO reductions by 2030, rather than waiting decades to see CSO reductions in the Alewife Brook while doing full sewer separation. The tank also offers long-term value because it can later be converted to a stormwater storage facility once sewer separation is completed.

Is the Rindge Avenue conveyance upgrade proposed in the Draft Updated CSO Control Plan dependent on the Sherman Street tank?

No. The Rindge Ave conveyance upgrade is a secondary component of the strategy for mitigating CSOs at CAM401A. The core component is the CSO storage tank, and size of that tank is dependent upon whether the Rindge Ave component is implemented.

Can we use our marshes or wetlands for stormwater storage and/or treatment?

EPA and MassDEP have regulations to protect existing marshes, wetlands, and waters, and to not allow changes. The existing Alewife wetland was constructed in an upland area, not an existing wetland. While it is possible to construct wetlands for stormwater storage and/or treatment, it is difficult to identify land in the right location that can be converted to a wetland for these purposes, and the permitting process for this type of work is lengthy.

COMMUNITY INPUT/COMMUNICATIONS

Has the City engaged the neighborhood directly about this project?

There have been two community meetings and one pop-up on-site event to discuss this project. In addition to meetings that have been open to the public, the City also offered individual meetings with direct abutters of the site in May 2026.

Does the City have a website with updates and announcements?

camb.ma/shermanstreetfacility

Have you been working with the Montessori School on Bellis Circle?

We are in communication with the school, and they were included in our invitations to meet with direct abutters.

ODOR

Can you explain the odor control system used for the tank?

Air in the tank will be continuously pulled inward and forced through a carbon filter system to discharge, so it will not seep out other openings.

How will you prevent odor impacts on the community?

The design will use industry standards for how often the air in the tank is replaced and treated, based on the total tank volume. A properly maintained and operating odor control system makes sure the public is not impacted by odors from the facility.

Where will the tank vents be located? How visible or hidden will they be?

The odor control system will be above ground but will be set back from both Sherman Street and Bellis Circle. The system will comply with all City noise ordinance requirements.

Will we be able to smell the tank?

A properly maintained and operating odor control system will minimize the chance that the public will be impacted by odors.

CONSTRUCTION

Is this project a typical DPW construction project in scope, cost, and duration?

Yes. Although this is a large tank, it's consistent with complex infrastructure projects built in the City. In 2020, the City DPW completed its PL6 stormwater tank and pump station on a site that was more tightly constrained than Sherman Street.

How will dirt be hauled away?

By dump truck. We are evaluating truck routes that use the MBTA railway corridor as an option to help reduce the impact of truck hauling on Sherman Street.

What type of excavation is needed?

The excavation will remove asphalt, historical fill, native soil, and deeper layers of clay. The City does not anticipate rock removal. Most of the material will be removed by long-arm excavators.

What kind of noise will we hear once the tank activates?

The pumps emptying the tank will be in an enclosed underground space that contains the sound. The blower for the odor control system will be a fan within a soundproof enclosure. The facility design will comply with all City noise ordinance requirements.

How will the construction noise compare to the work happening at Jefferson Park?

While there will be more vibrations, the noise from this project will be less.

Will there be pre-construction surveys conducted on abutting properties? How about post-construction surveys?

Yes. It is standard City practice to conduct pre-construction surveys. A third-party vendor documents the property. That third party doesn't share that information with the City unless the property owner files a claim. The City does not traditionally conduct post-construction surveys.

The Cambridge Montessori School is right next door. Will they be able to hold classes during this project?

Construction occurs all over the City near schools and other public-facing offices. The City will coordinate with the school before and during construction to understand the noise impacts and adjust accordingly.

This site is extremely close to old, residential homes. Does the City have experience with designing and constructing projects similar to this site?

The City and its technical team have ample experience constructing complicated projects in old urban areas like this site. Using our breadth of experience, we will be evaluating the construction methods best for this site, the old homes that surround it, and the soil underneath.

What is the accountability process if neighbors are affected by construction? Who do we contact, and how will damage or ongoing issues be investigated and resolved?

The City will provide three points of contact during construction, which may include a project email address or phone number. Once we get closer to construction, exact contact information will be made available. In addition, a third-party vendor will conduct pre-construction surveys at the properties directly next to the site. This will support the property owner if any claims are filed. Details on filing claims will be provided at that time upon request.

A third-party vendor will conduct pre-construction surveys to document existing conditions before construction at properties directly next to the site, which will be identified at the final design. Information on filing a claim will be provided upon request.

Will vibration and dust monitoring data be managed and shared?

Yes, weekly on the project website once construction begins.

How will we know what the monitoring requirements will be?

Work will follow the City's noise ordinance. For dust, no visible dust may leave the site and any dirt tracked out of the site is to be removed by mechanical sweeping. For vibration, limits will be set. Work stops if limits are exceeded. The City will provide the monitoring requirements and limits in the tank's final design document in Spring 2027.

How will this impact our property values?

We understand that construction can be temporarily disruptive and may raise concerns about nearby property values. However, this project is an investment in important public infrastructure that improves water quality and helps the City meet its legal and moral obligations to protect local waterways. Similar infrastructure improvement projects elsewhere in the City have not been connected to any negative long-term impact on property values. Maintaining and upgrading essential public infrastructure helps support a healthy, resilient, and attractive community.

What is going on top at the site?

The surface of the site will be fully restored, with a publicly accessible sidewalk on the north side of Bellis Circle and potentially, a future City building planned as a DPW facility.

How long will construction take, and what are the hours?

Construction will take about 30 months, including restoring the site after construction, typically Monday–Friday, 7 a.m.–4 p.m. (until 6 p.m. under the noise ordinance), with limited potential for night or weekend work. More details will be provided at the construction community meeting, slated for Winter 2027.

SOIL

Is there a soil report available?

<https://www.cambridgema.gov/-/media/Files/publicworksdepartment/Engineering/cityprojects/135shermanstmultiusefacility/environmentalconditionssummary.pdf>

A report summarizing additional 2026 data will be available in Fall 2026.

I don't want to read the entire report. What is the soil quality?

The soil is older fill commonly found in developed urban areas, with contaminant levels detected below state residential thresholds. Earlier cleanup removed a large amount of contaminated soil, but some remaining petroleum-related contamination remains in some areas of the site and may be found during construction. The report indicates that the site can be developed with proper soil handling and safety measures. The City has extensive experience excavating and managing impacted soils during construction work to prioritize neighborhood safety, uphold environmental safety measures, and comply with regulations. Best management practices to prevent dust will be required for the contractor, and the environmental professional will conduct dust monitoring to make sure dust levels are being controlled.

How does Boston blue clay impact construction?

Boston blue clay soil is common for this area and where we have also constructed other major projects, like the Parking Lot 6 tank and the tank at the newly opened Tobin School. The City and technical team have a lot of experience constructing these conditions and do not expect impacts.

TRAFFIC

Once construction begins, will the train whistles begin to blow again?

We are in discussion with MBTA on how to plan and manage the City's work zone so that horn blows do not occur throughout construction. There will be short, defined periods during normal work hours where crews will need to move safety barriers next to the railway tracks at the start and end of work. This will require these horn blows, which are a safety measure required by federal rules. These disruptions will be communicated in advance during construction.

Where is the MBTA in all of this?

The City has been coordinating with the MBTA and will have a license agreement in place before active construction begins. We will be working next to the Fitchburg commuter rail tracks. We anticipate having several meetings with the MBTA to go through the project details and how they could affect the T's operations.

How will traffic be impacted in the area surrounding the construction site?

Just like streets next to any construction site, traffic patterns will change temporarily. The City recognizes the traffic that exists in the Sherman Street area and the neighborhood's concern about the pressure that additional trucking will put on the neighborhood. The City will work with the Department of Transportation and the contractor to develop a Traffic Management Plan that will prioritize the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and construction workers at the site. The Traffic Management Plan will be updated as the project moves forward. The City is also exploring options to ease the pressure wherever possible, including creation of a hauling route along the train tracks as an option to help reduce construction trucking on Sherman Street. The draft Traffic Management Plan will be shared at the construction community meeting, slated for Winter 2027.