City of Cambridge
Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

CMA 2026-304
IN CITY COUNCIL
November 2, 2026

To the Honorable, the City Council:

Please see attached a memo from John Nardone, Commissioner for Public Works, transmitting a response to Awaiting Report 2026-66 regarding discussions with MWRA about water improvements and advancements to CSO infrastructure without requiring the taking of public parkland or causing prolonged disruption to Magazine Beach. Please also see a letter transmitted from the City Manager's office to the Executive Director of the MWRA.

Very truly yours,

Yi-An Huang
City Manager

City of Cambridge
Department of Public Works

John F Nardone, Commissioner

147 Hampshire Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
theworks@cambridgema.gov

Voice: 617 349 4800
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October 27, 2026

To: Yi-An Huang
City Manager

From: John Nardone
Commissioner

Re: POR 2026-199, requesting that the MWRA reconsider plans to construct a 10 million gallon CSO storage tank beneath Magazine Beach.

In response to the above referenced report please be advised that On October 5, 2026, City staff participated in a community meeting hosted by Magazine Beach Partners to discuss the Draft Updated Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Control Plan and MWRA's recommended alternative for the Cottage Farm outfall. Throughout the Draft Plan process and prior public meetings, MWRA's proposal had been presented as a 10.1-million-gallon underground storage tank located beneath the fields at Magazine Beach. At the October 5 meeting, MWRA staff stated that the entire 2.3-acre area above the tank would be permanently fenced off for security purposes such an approach would significantly impact Magazine Beach and is not supported by the City, and we do not believe it would receive Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) or legislative approval under Article 97 (M.G.L. c. 3, § 5A).

Magazine Beach is a critical and heavily used open space resource. The City, DCR, and the community have invested tens of millions of dollars over decades to restore and maintain the park, and the area plays a central role in Cambridge's recreation system and riverfront access. There are multiple examples, including Cambridge's own Joan Lorentz Park, located above a 300,000-gallon stormwater tank—where underground storage facilities have been constructed with full public access maintained above them**.** Prior to October 5, no indication had been given that a similar approach would not be feasible at Magazine Beach.

The City appreciates that MWRA has agreed to continue discussions with the community. Moving forward, the City's position is that planning for any infrastructure at Magazine Beach must:

- fully evaluate alternatives;
- minimize impacts to public open space; and be
- guided by the long-term protection of this critical community resource.

Cambridge remains committed to continued collaboration with MWRA, Somerville, and state and federal partners to advance CSO reduction efforts. Successful progress will require transparent communication, accurate information, and rebuilding trust within the community. The City will continue to participate actively in the public review process and will advocate for solutions that support both regional water quality improvements and the preservation of Magazine Beach. In addition to the stormwater tank at Joan Lorentz Park, the Department of

Public Works (DPW) has successfully designed and constructed tanks at several other locations where the surface above the tank has been returned to the public for various uses after construction. As the design of projects in the Updated Combined Sewer Overflow progresses, DPW will share our experience with MWRA to ensure that surface above these facilities can return to its intended use while still being able to operate new CSO control infrastructure. DPW will also collaborate with MWRA on the logistics of construction to limit the public impact and duration of projects.

The comment period on the Draft Updated Combined Sewer Overflow Control Plan for Alewife Brook, Upper Mystic River and Charles River ends on October 30, 2026. This is a critical milestone in developing the final plan. Over the next 6 months, the Partners will be working together to review all the comments received on the Draft Plan and developing the final plan for submission to DEP and EPA in May 2027.

Attachment: City Manager Letter to MWRA

City of Cambridge
Executive Department

YI-AN HUANG
City Manager

October 9, 2026

Stephen Estes-Smargiassi, Executive Director
Massachusetts Water Resources Authority
2 Griffin Way
Chelsea, MA 02150

Dear Stephen,

I am writing to follow up on the community meeting held with the Magazine Beach Partners on Monday October 5, 2026. The focus of the meeting was on the Draft Updated Combined Sewer Overflow Control Plan (Draft Plan) and specifically MWRA's alternative for reducing CSOs at Cottage Farm. Magazine Beach Partners had requested the meeting to ensure the community understood the proposal and to help them make informed comments on the Draft Plan.

MWRA's recommended alternative as presented in the Draft Plan and at all previous public meetings indicated a 10.1-million-gallon storage tank under the soccer and baseball fields and other open space fields.

At Monday's meeting, MWRA staff stated that the entire area above the storage tank would be permanently fenced off. Despite the fact that we have been working collaboratively with the MWRA over the past five years, we had not been notified of these plans prior to the meeting. It would result in a significant impact at Magazine Beach and are actions that we as Project Partners were not aware of. This is not an appropriate approach to planning and design of such a facility. And to be clear, the City does not support and does not believe that DCR or the legislature (which would have to approve this project through the Article 97 process) would ever support permanently closing off 2.3 acres of Magazine Beach. We firmly believe this simply is not a viable proposal.

Magazine Beach is a critical open space for the City, DCR and the community. It provides access to and along the Charles River, provides quiet and active recreation spaces, and is heavily used and loved by many in the community. In 2008, the City made a significant financial contribution to DCR's reconstruction of Magazine Beach and performs ongoing maintenance of the fields due to their critical value to Cambridge's Recreation Programs and use by the broader community. The City, DCR and the community greatly value and appreciate the incredible resource that Magazine Beach is to our open space network.

There are numerous examples of storage tanks in the region and across the country that have been constructed with active accessible open spaces above them. Cambridge constructed and maintains a 300,000 gallon stormwater holding under the 3-acre open space at Joan Lorentz Park. Prior to Monday, there were no indications that a similar approach would not be taken at Magazine Beach.

Even before the MWRA shared the proposal to fence off the entire 2.3 acre area, City staff had suggested numerous ways to design storage at this location that would reduce CSOs, while minimizing the impacts and supporting the primary function of Magazine Beach as a critical open space for the community. Key City staff suggestions posed included the storage being located between the BU Bridge and the Grand Junction Railroad Bridge. Or, what if the above-ground facilities required to support the storage were located within the existing Cottage Farm building or surrounding facility? However, instead of engaging in a thoughtful discussion of how best to expand storage at Cottage Farm and support the continued use of Magazine Beach, the MWRA proposed the 10.1-million-gallon tank CSO control alternative in a way that appears to maximize its impact and does not adequately reflect considerations for Magazine Beach.

I appreciate that the MWRA has agreed to return to the community to continue this discussion. Moving forward, this work must be approached in a more thoughtful and meaningful way, one that carefully balances necessary infrastructure planning with the fundamental need to preserve Magazine Beach as a high-quality open space valued by so many in our dense urban community. The City's position is that any future planning for infrastructure at Magazine Beach must fully consider alternatives and be guided by the long-term protection and enhancement of this critical public resource. This type of integrated approach has been successful elsewhere and can be achieved here with genuine commitment and collaboration.

The City and the community have long supported continued CSO reductions and infrastructure investment. For more than 30 years, we have worked collaboratively with the MWRA, and we look forward to continuing that partnership. To do so effectively, we need to work transparently with each other and with the public, sharing clear and accurate information and rebuilding trust in both the process and the teams involved.

I hope that under your leadership, the MWRA will commit to this approach and join us in strengthening trust with the community as we move this important work forward. The City remains committed to being a vital partner in this effort, while continuing to strongly advocate for the protection of Magazine Beach as an essential community asset.

Very truly yours,



Yi-An Huang
City Manager

Cc: State Representative Mike Connolly
State Representative Marjorie Decker
State Representative Michael Moran
State Representative Steven Owens
State Representative David Rogers
State Representative Daniel Ryan
Cambridge City Councillors
Mayor Jake Wilson, City of Somerville
Rich Raiche, Somerville Director of Infrastructure and Asset Management
Ken Carson, Magazine Beach Partners
Rebecca Bowie, President, Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association,
Steven Miller, Cambridgeport Neighborhood Association
Susannah King, Massachusetts DEP, Wastewater Section Chief
Todd Borci, United States EPA, Region 1
Nicole LaChapelle, Commissioner, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation
Kathleen Murtagh, MWRA Chief Operating Officer