

ASK THE TAC



Is there documentation from a reputable source indicating the frequency at which municipalities or “owners” should conduct wastewater master plans? I have heard rules of thumb but wonder if NASSCO has ever taken an official stance on this. Anything that you can share would be super helpful.



While we realize you are looking for something more definitive, the answer is “it depends.”

From a practical perspective master plans should be reviewed for relevance and the need for updating at a frequency proportional to their complexity and the financial and/or regulatory ramifications associated with the plan. That’s a big deal in a big, complex city and not too big a deal in smaller towns and municipalities.

A good master plan should be a bit of a living document, so re-visiting it on a small scale annually just to make sure it is still relevant (and the basis for the plan hasn’t radically changed) is good practice. It doesn’t require much effort and will assist the owner in looking at the document from the perspective of making an annual judgment as to when it is the right time. A master plan that sits on a shelf and doesn’t provide annual guidance doesn’t sound like a very good plan. If that’s the case, it should be re-written in such a manner that provides value so people actually use it.

Regulators who often drive the wastewater master planning processes usually like to see some form of update or reporting on the adequacy of the plans on about a five-year cycle. This doesn’t

mean they need to be completely re-written; they just want to know if a plan is still relevant and whether it is in need of updating at some frequency that is reasonably aligned with most capital planning processes. The minimum bar for most is about a five-year cycle for short turn planning.

Please note that there is no magic to the five-year value and no need to completely re-write a master plan at whatever frequency works for the owner and the regulator, if the over-arching planning basis is still valid. This is intended to be a routine process that is carried out to advise when it is time for a major re-write.

Lastly, and it is something we try to incorporate into master plans, is some insight and discussion into the planning cycle and the fundamental basis for the plans (i.e. growth or reduction/improvement targets that, if they are exceeded or not met, would warrant initiation of the next review. Simply stated, some criteria or indicators that the plan is no longer valid. While “it depends” is not a great answer, we do hope this provided some guidance and insight.

**Have a technical question?
Email TAC@NASSCO.org**