**Buried No Longer Op-Ed (to customize as needed)**

The health and prosperity of [*name of community*] is largely dependent upon a buried network of water and wastewater pipes that we never see and take largely for granted. But these pipes are aging and in need of serious repair, and it’s time we confronted our water infrastructure challenge.

[*Add in a couple examples of pressing infrastructure projects, serious main breaks, or other events that illustrate how infrastructure needs replacing.*]

The American Water Works Association released a report in February 2012 entitled “Buried No Longer: Confronting America’s Water Infrastructure Challenge.” This report analyzes the cost of repairing and expanding the U.S.’s drinking water infrastructure. It focuses on the original timing of water system development in our country, the various materials from which pipes were made, the life expectancy of the various types and sizes of pipes, and the cost of replacing these pipes.

The results are startling. The national cost of repairing and expanding buried drinking water infrastructure will exceed $1 trillion in the next 25 years and $1.7 trillion over 40 years. Small communities may face the biggest challenges, because they have fewer people across whom to spread these costs.

These figures don’t even include wastewater costs, which are thought to be similar.

[*Name of utility*] took a hard look at our own drinking water infrastructure using the same methodology employed by the AWWA report. [*Name of utility*] estimates that more than [*dollar estimate*] will be needed over the next [*number of years*] to maintain today’s level of service and reliability.

[*If you have any data that articulates your wastewater infrastructure needs, insert that here*.]

We have never been here before as community or as a nation. The water infrastructure in the ground was largely built by previous generations. But now that today’s challenge has been established, it’s time to focus on solutions.

[*Name of utility*] maintains its systems primarily through customer water rates [*add other financing if relevant*]. We can expect customer water bills to rise as we strive to address these needs. The federal government, however, can play an important role in helping communities like ours manage these costs.

Here’s one idea we can all get behind. [*Name of utility*] strongly supports the creation of a Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Authority, a federal financing mechanism that would do two things. First, WIFIA would provide low interest federal loans for large water infrastructure restoration and expansion projects, and second, it would help local communities like ours address more infrastructure needs at a lower cost. That means all of us who pay for water and wastewater service would ultimately pay less – without adding to the long-term federal deficit.

Legislation has already been proposed in U.S. Congress [*check awwa.org/infrastructure for the state of current legislation.*] While WIFIA is a great idea, its passage depends on support from communities like ours. It’s vital that each of us encourage our U.S. Congressional representatives to stand behind this much-needed legislation. At the same time, we need to encourage our local public officials to be leaders on this cause, and to support them in making the decisions necessary to address the issue.

As daunting as this water infrastructure challenge may seem, it becomes more serious if we do not act. Waiting will only raise the price tag on projects while threatening public health and safety.

When we consider everything that our water services deliver – protecting our public health and environment, providing fire protection, supporting our economy, and assuring the high quality of life we enjoy here in *[name of community]*, it’s clear that we can no longer bury our water infrastructure challenge.