Bringing Sewers to Warwick: Leo Roy and the Warwick Sewer Authority

Compiled October 6, 2026 by Claude AI, edited by Patty Roy

Introduction

Leo R. Roy helped bring the first public sewers to Warwick, Rhode Island, and served the city's sewer program for about eight years, from January 1962 to May 1970.

He held three posts in a row. He sat on the citizens' committee that studied the idea, he was one of the five original members of the Warwick Sewer Authority, and he then chaired the board that heard homeowners' appeals of their sewer bills.

Warwick before sewers

In 1962 Warwick had about 70,000 people in more than 20,000 homes and no public sewer system. The Evening Bulletin called it the only city in the state without one (Dec. 5, 1962).

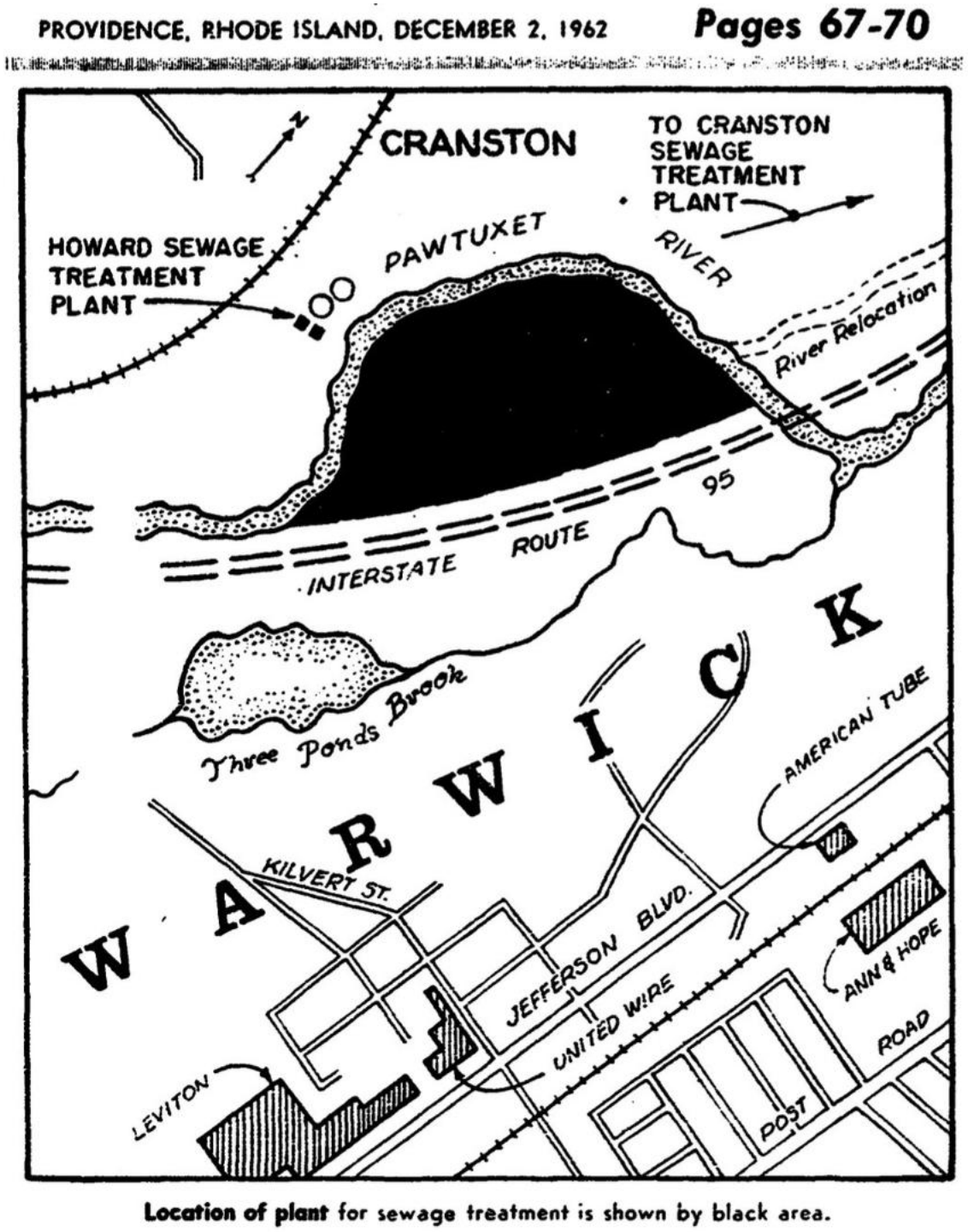
Every home and business relied on a cesspool or septic tank. One Authority member estimated that residents paid about $64,000 a year to have them pumped. Leo added that acid treatments pushed the real figure to at least $100,000 a year (Evening Bulletin, July 31, 1962).

The city had tried before and failed. A $6,000,000 sewer bond issue was defeated in 1958, and the Authority's chairman later said it lost because no one explained it to voters (Providence Sunday Journal, Dec. 2, 1962).

By 1962 three things had changed:

- **A plan existed.** The engineering firm Charles A. Maguire and Associates of Providence had surveyed the city for $35,000. It proposed a treatment plant on the Pawtuxet River and a system built in phases.
- **Federal money was on offer.** Congress was debating a public works bill for areas of high unemployment that could match the city's money dollar for dollar.
- **Waiting cost money.** The whole system had been priced at $30 million in 1956 and $42 million in 1962. The Providence Sunday Journal reported that the cost rose about 4 percent for each year of delay.

Industry was part of the argument too. Supporters said sewers would attract industry and widen the tax base. The first phase was drawn to cover most of the industrial land near Jefferson Boulevard.



The site chosen for the treatment plant, shown in black, with the Jefferson Boulevard factories below it. The Providence Sunday Journal, Sunday, December 2, 1962, page N-67.

The Warwick Sewer Authority

The Warwick Sewer Authority was created by the Rhode Island General Assembly in the spring of 1962 as a five-member board appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the city council. The law is Chapter 254 of the Public Laws of 1962.

How the members were chosen

The law tried to keep the board balanced between the parties. Each party's city chairman gave the mayor a list of ten names. The mayor had to pick two from each list and a fifth member with no party label.

Leo's name was on the Democratic list sent in by city chairman Joseph P. McKeever (Evening Bulletin, May 8, 1962). Mayor Horace E. Hobbs announced his five choices on May 14. The council confirmed them that week, and the mayor swore them in at their first meeting on May 28, 1962.



Warwick Sewer Authority members being sworn in by Mayor Hobbs are (l-r), Manuel F. Cooney, Ugo S. Garganese, Charles A. Schurman, chairman; Raymond M. MacDonald, secretary, and Leo R. Roy.
— Journal-Bulletin Photo

The swearing-in on May 28, 1962. The printed caption names Leo last, at far right. The Evening Bulletin, Tuesday, May 29, 1962.

Member	Party	First term	Notes from the clippings
Charles A. Schurman	None	4 years	Elected chairman. Principal of Lockwood High School when Hobbs was assistant school superintendent. Managed Hobbs's 1960 campaign and chaired the earlier advisory

Member	Party	First term	Notes from the clippings
			committee.
Raymond M. MacDonald	Republican	1 year	Elected secretary. Chairman of the First Ward Republican Committee.
Leo R. Roy	Democrat	2 years	Of 1380 Post Road at the time. Served on the earlier advisory committee. Not on any ward committee.
Manuel F. Cooney	Republican	3 years	Former city health inspector. The Evening Bulletin placed him on the Fourth Ward Republican Committee. The Sunday Journal said he was on no ward committee.
Ugo S. Garganese	Democrat	5 years	Member of the Fourth Ward Democratic Committee. Also from the advisory committee.

The terms were staggered so that one seat came up each year.

A rough welcome

The appointments were criticized the night they reached the council. Two Republican councilmen and former Mayor Raymond E. Stone complained that the board had no civil engineer and was too political. Three Democratic councilmen, including future governor Philip W. Noel, defended the choices and said the board could hire expert advice (Providence Journal, May 15, 1962).

The Sunday Journal looked at each member's political ties on June 3, 1962. It named MacDonald and Garganese as active party workers and noted that Leo held no seat on any ward committee.

What the board could do

At first the Authority could only plan and inform the public. Its full powers switched on only if voters approved a $4,000,000 bond issue.

After the vote it could build and run the system, take land, hire staff, set charges, and order owners to connect. Its meetings were on the second and fourth Mondays at city hall.

Members were paid. In December 1962 the council was set to vote on $1,800 a year for members and $2,300 for the chairman. School committee members then got $800 (Evening Bulletin, Dec. 19, 1962).

Leo Roy's role

Leo appears by name in most of the newspaper clippings, and the picture they give is of a practical member who watched costs, checked the contractors' work, and wanted the city to keep its word to homeowners.



Leo R. Roy, from the portraits of the five Authority members printed in The Providence Sunday Journal, Sunday, December 2, 1962. Reprint of photo that appeared on December 6, 1955, page 5, The Evening Bulletin.

Years	Post	How it began and ended
January to May 1962	Member, Sewer Survey Advisory Committee	Named by Mayor Hobbs to a 21-member citizens' committee.
May 1962 to January 1965	Member, Warwick Sewer Authority	Appointed by Mayor Hobbs from the Democratic list. Replaced by Joseph P. McKeever.
January 1965 to May 1970	Member, then chairman, Sewer Board of Review	Appointed at the January 1965 inaugural council meeting. Replaced by William Caron.

The advisory committee, early 1962

Leo's first sewer post was on the mayor's 21-member Sewer Survey Advisory Committee, which reviewed the engineers' report before the city asked the legislature to act. He sat on its four-man legislative subcommittee (Evening Bulletin, Jan. 23, 1962).

Fact-finding, summer 1962

The new Authority sent Leo out to learn how other cities did it.

- **Hartford, July 12.** Leo and Manuel Cooney went to study the Metropolitan District Commission's way of charging for sewers. They reported back that Hartford paid for plants and trunk lines with bonds and billed owners by the foot of frontage (Evening Bulletin, July 10 and 17, 1962).
- **Cranston, July 26.** Leo, Cooney, Garganese and the chairman met Cranston officials about sharing that city's plant. Leo reported that they had discussed a joint authority. The board judged the idea too complicated (Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin, July 31, 1962).

Chasing land and money, 1963

Once voters said yes, Leo was often one of the members sent to press the city's case.

- **New York, April 23.** He flew down with the chairman and the board's lawyer in the engineering firm's private plane to deliver contract specifications to the federal housing agency (Evening Bulletin, April 23, 1963).
- **The State House, May 1.** He and Ugo Garganese went to push a bill giving Warwick about 50 acres of state land on the Pawtuxet River for the plant. The Bulletin reported the next day that they had apparently succeeded in getting it introduced. Governor Chafee had threatened a veto.
- **New York again, July 19.** He was part of Mayor Hobbs's delegation asking federal agencies to let the city shift money between parts of the project, which was running about $1,500,000 over budget (Providence Journal, July 20, 1963).



Signing first contract for sewer installations in Warwick yesterday were seated, from left, Vincent F. Capaldi, president of V. F. Capaldi Construction Co., the contractors; Raymond McDonald, sewer authority secretary, and Charles A. Schurman, authority chairman. Other authority members standing, from left, Leo Roy, Ugo Gargancse and Manuel Cooney.

—Journal-Bulletin Photo

Signing the first construction contract, April 14, 1963. The printed caption names Leo first among the three members standing. The Providence Journal, April 15, 1963.

Watching the work

Leo's remarks at meetings were usually about what was happening on the ground.

- He doubted that rebidding the road-patching work would save money. Leo Roy of the authority said he thinks this would be “too much work and the bids might come in even higher than the present costs for cold patching.” (Evening Bulletin, July 30, 1963).
- He raised the point that contractors seemed to think one layer of asphalt was enough on the torn-up streets. The engineers confirmed the state required at least two (Providence Journal, Oct. 8, 1963).

- When potholes drew complaints, he proposed that the chief inspector take charge of checking the roads (Providence Journal and Evening Bulletin, Jan. 28, 1964).
- He asked the low bidder on the delayed Pontiac contract whether the firm would bid again. The job was rebid that October, and the winning price came in about $21,000 lower (Evening Bulletin, July 21 and Oct. 27, 1964).
- He suggested sewering 1,076 feet of Post Road near the Greenwood bridge so that stretch would be ready before the state repaved the road. The idea was tabled, and the cost was put at $51,385 (Evening Bulletin, Aug. 11, 1964).
- He said he thought some inspectors at the treatment plant were standing idle. His three-word phrase was that he thought some inspectors “just stand around.” Cooney disagreed (Evening Bulletin, Oct. 27, 1964).

Keeping the price promise, August 1964

Leo's clearest stand came when the Authority set the charge homeowners would pay. Voters had been told in 1962 to expect about $6 a foot of frontage plus roughly $100 to connect. The board settled on $7.40 a foot.

Leo argued for $7. The Evening Bulletin of Aug. 4, 1964 quotes him: "I'm in no mood to go back on what we told the people." The final vote for $7.40 was reported as unanimous.

He was also cautious about entangling Warwick with its neighbors. When the board discussed joint sewer service with West Warwick, he said: "I don't like the idea of getting tied up with other communities too much" (Providence Journal, July 14, 1964).

Leaving the Authority, January 1965

Leo's seat went to Joseph P. McKeever, the Democratic city chairman who had first put his name forward. McKeever took the seat at the meeting of Jan. 11, 1965.

The newspaper clippings disagree about when Leo's term had run out. The Bulletin of May 18, 1962 gives June 1, 1964. The Journal of Feb. 2, 1965 says Feb. 1, 1964. Either way he stayed on for most of a year after it expired.

At the Feb. 1, 1965 meeting the members formally cited Leo and Manuel Cooney for their contributions during their terms.

Chairman of the Sewer Board of Review, 1965 to 1970

Leo moved straight to a new three-member board that heard appeals from owners who thought their sewer bills were wrong. He was appointed with Cooney and Albert D. Arabian at the city's inaugural council meeting in early January 1965.

By October 1965 Leo was chairman. The council gave first passage to an ordinance paying him $450 a year and the other members $400 (Evening Bulletin, Nov. 23, 1965).

The board held its first hearing on Nov. 23, 1965. The cases in the newspaper clippings are about odd-shaped lots:

- **A triangular lot on Kentucky Avenue.** The owners had been billed for frontage on two streets. The board cut the bill to the longer side only, 266 feet, bringing it from $3,085.40 to $1,968.40 (Evening Bulletin, Nov. 24, 1965).
- **A lot backing onto Tennessee Avenue.** The board trimmed the billed frontage from 81 feet to 70, an $81.40 saving (Evening Bulletin, Jan. 26, 1966).
- **A gas station site on Post Road.** The board halved the bill, from $2,368 to $1,184, and Leo agreed with assessing one side only (Evening Bulletin, March 14, 1967).

Leo was reelected chairman on Jan. 4, 1966 and again, unanimously, on Feb. 20, 1967. That last meeting was held at the new sewer plant on Service Avenue.

His name is on the list of board members that Mayor Philip Noel was sending to the council in July 1969. He was replaced by William Caron in May 1970 (Evening Bulletin, May 26, 1970).

Selling the bond issue

The Authority's first job was to win the referendum. It hired a Warwick public relations firm, set up booths in five shopping centers, ran a telephone campaign staffed by about 40 women, and mailed a booklet to about 21,000 households (Providence Sunday Journal, Dec. 2, 1962).

Republican critics said taxpayers were paying to be persuaded. Former Mayor Stone's wing of the party called the Authority too powerful and the program too rushed, and feared for the city's finances with new schools and a library also planned.

The vote was first planned for Sept. 4, 1962. Mayor Hobbs called it off on Aug. 3 because Congress had not yet passed the public works bill that would bring matching federal money.

That bill appears to be the one that became the Public Works Acceleration Act, signed on Sept. 14, 1962. With about $2,500,000 in federal grants already approved, the referendum was held on Dec. 4.

Referendum of Dec. 4, 1962	Result
In favor	8,096
Opposed	3,397
Turnout	28 percent of 40,547 eligible voters
Voting districts carried	36 of 38

It lost only in Natick and Potowomut. The Bulletin called it the largest local bond issue Warwick had ever approved.



All right, let's get started. With a green light from the voters, members of Warwick's Sewer Authority consider their project with the aid of a city map. They are (l-r) Ugo S. Garganese, Charles A. Schurman, chairman; Leo R. Roy, and Raymond M. MacDonald. The chairman is pointing out the spot to begin work.
—Journal-Bulletin Photo

The day after the vote. The printed caption names, left to right, Ugo S. Garganese, Charles A. Schurman, Leo R. Roy and Raymond M. MacDonald. The Evening Bulletin, Wednesday, December 5, 1962.

Paying for it

The first phase was budgeted at $8,000,000, half from the city's bonds and half from federal grants. It covered the treatment plant and sewers for about 15,000 people in the Norwood, Hillsgrove and Greenwood areas.

Estimate	Amount	Source
First phase	$8,000,000	Evening Bulletin, May 14, 1962
Whole city, to be finished about 2010	$42,000,000	Evening Bulletin, May 14, 1962
Whole city, revised	$58,000,000	Evening Bulletin, Aug. 4, 1964
Treatment plant alone	$2,400,000	Providence Journal, Oct. 8, 1963

Bids came in high in 1963 and left the first phase about $1,500,000 short. The Authority cut four contracts by 23 percent each, postponed the Pontiac contract, and went to New York and Washington to ask federal agencies to move money between accounts.

The front-foot charge

Owners along a new sewer line were billed by the foot of street frontage, whether or not they connected. The bill could be paid at once or over 20 years at 4 percent interest.

Charge per front foot	Amount
Told to voters in 1962	$6, plus about $100 to connect
What the engineers' formula produced in 1964	$8.50
Leo's proposal	$7
Adopted Aug. 3, 1964	$7.40, connection included

A week later the city Republican chairman accused the Authority of breaking faith. He objected that assessments would cover only one-third of the cost and general taxes the rest. The Authority answered that the city's finances had changed in two years and that all its decisions had been unanimous (Evening Bulletin, Aug. 11, 1964).

Jobs and closed doors

The Providence Sunday Journal reported in April 1963 that about 50 people had applied for sewer inspector jobs paying $115 a week, and that the Authority discussed hiring in closed meetings. A sitting Democratic councilman was chosen as chief inspector.

The authority was to hire 15 sewer inspectors. By April 14, 1963, three had already been hired. The sewer authority refused to disclose any names. All discussion about hiring and job requirements were held in secret meetings. One inspector whose name was leaked was Francis O’Neill, a former Democratic councilman and nephew of Leo Roy.

The papers pressed the point about secrecy more than once. Rate discussions were held in closed session until the final vote on Aug. 3, 1964, which was taken in public.

Torn-up streets

Complaints about roads run through 1963 and 1964. Post Road in front of the airport was open for more than two months. The Authority itself criticized the mess left on Fairfax Drive, and an Elm Street resident came to a meeting about standing water and potholes.

Going it alone or joining neighbors

The board looked at sharing Cranston's plant in 1962 and decided against it. In 1964 it agreed to talk with West Warwick and East Greenwich about serving border neighborhoods such as Natick, Cowesett and Potowomut.

Getting people to connect

A sewer in the street did not mean a house was using it. By November 1965 fewer than a third of eligible buildings had tied in. The Authority laid off staff, and the council asked it to find ways to help owners connect (Evening Bulletin, Nov. 23, 1965).

What came after

The Warwick Sewer Authority that Leo helped start in 1962 is still the city's sewer agency, and its treatment plant still stands beside the Pawtuxet River, where the first board decided to build.

This section comes from websites.

- **The system grew far beyond the first phase.** The Authority now runs nearly 400 miles of sewer lines and 49 pump stations, according to a 2023 announcement from Rhode Island's U.S. senators.
- **Most of the city is now served.** A 2014 announcement put service at about 60,000 residents, roughly 70 percent of the city, on 21,500 accounts. The first phase served about 15,000 people.
- **The plant is much larger.** It can treat up to 7.7 million gallons a day and discharges to the Pawtuxet River. Its address is now 125 Arthur W. Devine Boulevard, per a state environmental summary.
- **The river site had a cost.** In late March 2010 the Pawtuxet flooded over the levee and put the plant under six to ten feet of water. A trade magazine account describes the damage. Repairs took months, and the levee was later raised.
- **The 1962 law is still the foundation.** The General Assembly amended it in 2016, and the amended text still provides for a three-member Sewer Board of Review, the body Leo chaired.

The forecast of 1962 was that the whole city would be sewered by about 2010 for $42,000,000. More than sixty years on, the work of extending and renewing the system continues.

Timeline

Date	Event	Leo's part
1958	Voters reject a $6,000,000 sewer bond issue.	
Mid-January 1962	Mayor Hobbs names a 21-member Sewer Survey Advisory Committee.	Member, legislative subcommittee
Spring 1962	The General Assembly passes the act creating the Warwick Sewer Authority.	
May 8, 1962	Party chairmen submit ten names each.	On the Democratic list

Date	Event	Leo's part
May 14, 1962	Mayor Hobbs names his five choices.	Appointed for two years
May 17, 1962	City council confirms the five.	
May 28, 1962	First meeting. Members sworn in. Schurman elected chairman.	Sworn in
July 12, 1962	Visit to Hartford's Metropolitan District Commission.	Went with Cooney
July 16, 1962	Authority picks the Pawtuxet River site for the plant, about 40 acres in Hillsgrove.	
July 26, 1962	Visit to Cranston's sewer officials.	Went with three colleagues
Aug. 3, 1962	Mayor Hobbs cancels the Sept. 4 referendum because Congress has not acted on federal aid.	
Dec. 4, 1962	Voters approve the $4,000,000 bond issue, 8,096 to 3,397.	
April 14, 1963	First construction contract signed with V. F. Capaldi Construction Co.	In the photograph
April 15, 1963	Ground-breaking scheduled for 9 a.m.	
April 23, 1963	Contract specifications flown to federal officials in New York.	Went with the chairman
May 1, 1963	Bill introduced to give the city the state-owned plant site.	Lobbied at the State House
July 19, 1963	Delegation asks federal agencies in New York to shift funds. First phase is about $1,500,000 over budget.	In the delegation
Summer 1963	Federal agencies approve a $285,000 transfer. Authority trims contracts to stay within $8,000,000.	

Date	Event	Leo's part
October 1963	Four of nine contracts near completion. Residents complain about torn-up streets.	Questions the asphalt work
Aug. 3, 1964	Front-foot charge set at $7.40.	Argued for $7
Aug. 10, 1964	Talks open with East Greenwich and West Warwick on cooperation.	Proposes sewering part of Post Road
Oct. 26, 1964	Tenth contract, the Pontiac section, awarded to Capaldi Bros. Corp. for $285,742.50.	
Early January 1965	Sewer Board of Review appointed.	Appointed
Jan. 11, 1965	McKeever takes Leo's seat on the Authority.	Leaves the Authority
Early 1965	Treatment plant expected to open.	
Nov. 23, 1965	Board of Review holds its first hearing.	Chairman
November 1965	Only 432 of 1,376 eligible buildings, 31.2 percent, have connected.	
Jan. 4, 1966	Board of Review reorganizes.	Reelected chairman
Feb. 20, 1967	Board of Review reorganizes at the Service Avenue plant.	Reelected chairman
May 1970	New appointments to the Board of Review.	Replaced by William Caron

People and terms

These are the names and words that come up again and again in the newspaper clippings.

People

Name	Who they were
Horace E. Hobbs	Mayor of Warwick, 1961 to 1966. He appointed

Name	Who they were
	Leo to all three posts. A former assistant school superintendent.
Raymond E. Stone	Republican mayor before Hobbs, 1957 to 1960, and the sewer program's loudest critic.
Philip W. Noel	Democratic councilman for Ward 5 in these years. Mayor from 1967 and governor of Rhode Island from 1973 to 1977.
Joseph P. McKeever	Democratic city chairman. He nominated Leo in 1962 and took his Authority seat in 1965.
Charles A. Schurman	Authority chairman throughout Leo's term.
Raymond M. MacDonald	Authority secretary. Later clippings spell the name McDonald.
Manuel F. Cooney	Republican member of the Authority, then Leo's colleague on the Board of Review.
Ugo S. Garganese	The other Democrat on the first Authority and Leo's frequent partner on errands.
Albert D. Arabian	Vice chairman of the Board of Review under Leo.
Alfred C. Nelson	Joined the Board of Review in 1967.
James P. Quirk	Lawyer for the Authority and later for the Board of Review.
James R. Morriss	City solicitor.
Glenn Kumekawa	City planner.
Ralph E. Tedeschi	City finance director.
Harold Bateson, Paul T. Carver, Howard B. Sherman Jr.	Engineers with Charles A. Maguire and Associates, the city's consultants.
Trowbridge K. Swan	Project engineer overseeing the inspectors.
Joseph S. Maher	Democratic councilman who became chief sewer inspector.
John H. Chafee	Republican governor, 1963 to 1969. He opposed giving the city the plant site for free.
John E. Fogarty	Congressman from Rhode Island, 1941 to 1967,

Name	Who they were
	credited with helping win the federal money.

Terms

Term	Meaning
Cesspool	An underground pit that collects a building's sewage and lets liquid seep into the soil. It has to be pumped out.
Bond issue	Money a city borrows by selling bonds, repaid with interest over many years. Warwick's needed voter approval.
Referendum	A public vote on a single question.
Front-foot assessment	A one-time charge to a property owner based on how many feet of the lot face a street with a sewer.
Abatement	A reduction in a bill. The Board of Review granted these.
Use charge	The yearly fee for sewer service, based on water consumption.
Lateral	A smaller sewer pipe running down a street to collect from houses.
Interceptor or trunk line	A large pipe that carries sewage from many laterals to the plant.
Pumping station	Machinery that lifts sewage uphill where gravity cannot carry it.
Digester	A tank at the treatment plant where solids break down.
Executive session	A meeting closed to the public and press.
HHFA	Housing and Home Finance Agency. The federal agency that helped pay for street sewers.
PHS	U.S. Public Health Service. It helped pay for interceptors, pumping stations and the plant.
ARA	Area Redevelopment Administration. The federal office with the final say over both grants.

Term	Meaning
Hartford's Metropolitan District Commission	A regional water and sewer agency chartered in 1929. Leo visited it in July 1962.
Fruit of the Loom, Pontiac	The textile plant in Warwick's Pontiac village. The state required the city to treat its waste as a condition of approving the river site. The mill closed in 1970.
Journal-Bulletin	The Providence Journal (morning) and The Evening Bulletin (afternoon) shared a publisher, so the same story or photo often ran in both.

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U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse	News release, Aug. 17, 2023	Miles of sewer line and number of pump stations today
U.S. Senator Jack Reed	News release, June 23, 2014	Residents served, the 2010 flood, the levee

Website	Page	Used for
R.I. Department of Environmental Management	Warwick facility summary (PDF)	Plant address, capacity, discharge to the Pawtuxet River
Treatment Plant Operator magazine	Underwater, January 2011	Depth of the March 2010 flood and the recovery
Justia	42 U.S. Code section 2641	Public Works Acceleration Act, Public Law 87-658, Sept. 14, 1962
Wikipedia	List of mayors of Warwick, Rhode Island	Terms of Mayors Stone, Hobbs and Noel
Wikipedia	Philip Noel	Noel's later career
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