

# Thinking About Things Differently

## Peoria, Illinois Stormwater Creation Project: Turning a Problem Into an Opportunity

“Can we solve a problem and create a legacy?”



Sewer/Sanitation



Poop



Water



State Government

3

Years prior to U.S.  
EPA Federal Mandate

\$550

Million Problem

\$8

Million/year Solution

### The Problem

In June 2016, Mayor Jim Ardis of Peoria, Illinois, stated that the city's combined sewer overflow was the biggest problem the city has ever faced. Peoria had been in ongoing negotiations with the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regarding a combined sewer consent decree that would cost Peoria an estimated \$550mm over ten years. The Sanitary Sewer System is in an operational district separate from the City of Peoria's government, which meant fees and revenue from the consent decree would go to the sanitary district; the city would have no say, no influence, and no ability to guide those efforts.

### The Encore

It began with shifting perspective, and asking, “What if we think about this differently?” to proactively find solutions to the problem instead of reacting. As a result, we got ahead of the decree by three years, empowering Mayor Ardis to take matters into his own hands and do what was best for his city.

### The Showpiece Solution

When we met with Mayor Ardis and his senior leadership team in July 2017, we started discussions by asking, “What if we separate the issue so the city and administration can be the winners here?” The Showpiece team suggested creating a stormwater utility that the city would own and control. The benefits were two-fold: invest in the community and spur economic development. The following week, Mayor Ardis and his team asked us to proceed.

Upon drafting the Stormwater Utility Ordinance, we began to educate stakeholders. By December 2017, City Council passed the stormwater utility to launch in July 2018, providing \$8 million a year for investment in stormwater utility infrastructure without impacting the city budget. This showed that the city was serious about compliance. It was a local win, passing on the forthcoming sanitary sewer fees that would fund the consent decree efforts required by the Federal Government.