

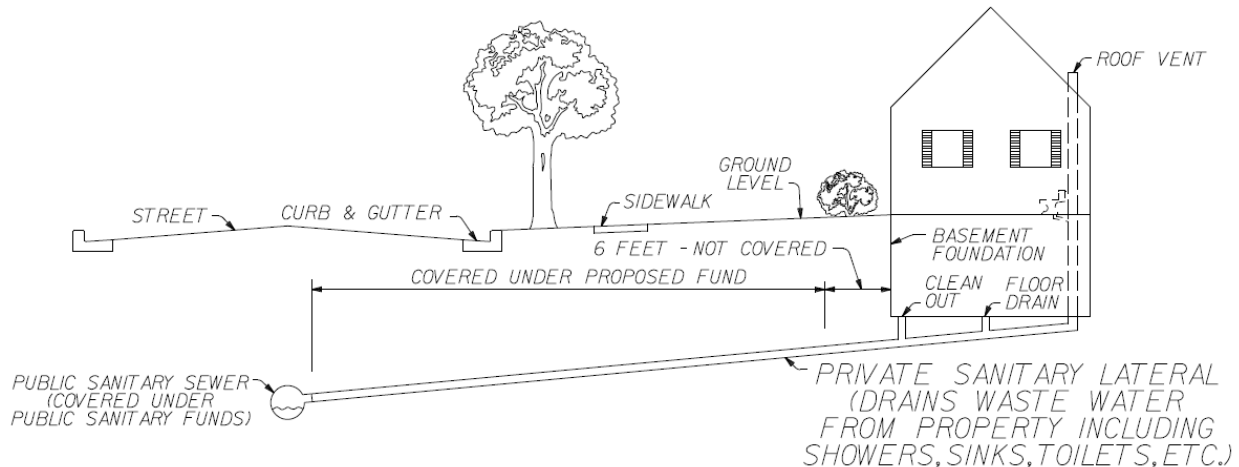
Residential Private Property Sanitary Inflow/Infiltration (I/I) Reduction Fund

Proposal By Department of Public Works, Engineering

Frequently Asked Questions

What is a sanitary sewer lateral and what does it do?

A sanitary sewer lateral is a pipe owned by the property owner that connects a building (home or commercial) to the sewer main. The sewer lateral is an essential part of the sanitary sewer system. It drains all waste water from your property (bathrooms, kitchens, showers, etc.) to the sanitary sewer main.



Who is responsible for maintenance of the sewer lateral?

The sanitary lateral is part of your property. Maintenance of the lateral is the responsibility of the property owner. Performing regular maintenance ensures the longevity of your lateral. With the proposed program, the property owner is still responsible for the cleaning, inspection and removal of roots or deposits which may result in reduced flow or blockage of the lateral.

What are the chances that my lateral will fail?

Many of the homes in the City of West Allis are older than 75 years. The average life of a sewer lateral is 75 to 100 years. Therefore, if nothing changed, we predict a significant increase in lateral failures over the next 25 years. While age is not the only cause of lateral failure, it is a consideration in predicting the chance of failure. The best way to determine the chance of failure of your lateral is to have it inspected.

What do I do if I am having a problem with my sewer lateral?

The first sign of a lateral problem is usually water ponding around or flowing out from the floor drain, which is usually located in the basement or in the laundry area of homes with no basement. The first step is to call Public Works (414-302-8800) to verify that the City main is not backing up. Then hire a plumbing or sewer cleaning contractor to investigate the problem. If the contractor believes that a structural failure exists, the City Engineer's office should be notified. If the City Engineer concurs that the problem is caused by a structural failure, arrangements will be made immediately to make the necessary repairs. If the problem is not an emergency, but does require rehabilitation, the work will be scheduled by the severity of the defects.

Most lateral problems are caused by blockages in the pipe and can be cleared by a plumbing or sewer cleaning contractor. If you have a blockage and it can be cleared by the contractor, it is a good idea to have your lateral inspected by the contractor. This inspection should be recorded on DVD or some other medium that can be shown to the City Engineer. The City Engineer can determine a priority for scheduling the rehabilitation of your lateral from the televised inspection.

Why does the City Engineer have to prioritize the rehabilitation or agree my sewer lateral has failed?

The Program fee was established to provide approximately 160 lateral rehabilitations per year and 25 emergency repairs. It is important that laterals to be rehabilitated are in need of rehabilitation and that failed laterals are actually failed. The number of failures and requests for rehabilitations will vary from year to year. It is possible that the cost to perform the number of rehabilitation requests and lateral failures would exceed the funding available for the year. To keep the cost of the program in check, it may be necessary to prioritize the rehabilitations. Laterals qualifying for rehabilitation are usually not on the brink of failure, so putting off the rehabilitation for a year or even longer should not be a concern for the owner.

Why is the fee needed?

This fee provides funding for work on private property to remove sources of clear water entering the sanitary system. Recent studies have shown that most clear water in the sanitary system (Inflow and Infiltration, I/I) is entering from private property sources. Removing I/I on private property is the most cost effective means to reduce clear water in the system, which reduces the risk of sewer back-ups and overflows into Lake Michigan during wet weather events.

This program also provides protection for the property owner. In the past, the property owner was responsible for any and all repairs to the sewer pipe that connects their home with the city sanitary sewer. If a failure were to occur, homeowners would be facing a repair bill averaging \$5,000 to \$15,000 or more, depending on the conditions. This proved to be a severe hardship to many homeowners. Because laterals are aging, failures and excessive leaking are becoming more common. This fee will help keep lateral repair and sewer flow reduction more affordable to property owners.

What is being changed and when does it take effect?

If the program passes, in the event of a structural failure of a sanitary lateral, the repair will be paid for by this program. A Special Assessment of \$3,000 will be billed to the property owner. The Special Assessment can be paid over a ten year term. In addition, the City will have a proactive program for rehabilitating laterals, targeting areas of excessive wet weather sewer flows along with requests for rehabilitations where property owners are experiencing problems. This lateral work will be paid for by the Fund and a Special Assessment of \$1,500 billed to the property owner. This Special Assessment can be paid over a ten year term as well.

What is my \$10 paying for?

First and foremost, the money goes toward the reduction in sanitary flows. This will reduce the risk for sewer back-ups and overflows, as well as reduce the future costs for having to convey and treat the additional flow. One of the direct benefits of this program to the property owner is that the program will pay toward the repair of failed sewer laterals and the rehabilitation of leaking sewer laterals, since they are a significant source of I/I. This means the property owner is no longer at risk of an unexpected major repair cost due to the failure of the sewer lateral. Additionally, the City plans to proactively repair or replace leaky laterals. The proactive work will reduce the number of failed laterals. All money generated by this fee will be used for work on private property.

Why do I have to pay a Special Assessment for an emergency repair or a rehabilitation?

A Special Assessment is needed to keep the fee at an affordable level. Special Assessments are typically charged for work that directly benefits a property. This assessment can be paid over a 10 year period. Any work requiring a Special Assessment is voluntary. Property owners will have to sign an agreement to pay the Special Assessment prior to any work being done.

My lateral is new. How do I benefit from this program?

By proactively managing sanitary sewer laterals we reduce the risk of sewer back-ups during wet weather events, which will help keep sewage out of your basement. Reducing the flows from private property will reduce the need for increasing the capacity in the conveyance and treatment systems and reduces the sewage treatment charges from the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District, which saves us all money. In addition, improved sanitary laterals will reduce leakage of sewage which can make its way into our creeks and rivers, which all drain to Lake Michigan. Cleaner water is a benefit everyone can enjoy. Having a newer lateral does not guarantee that you won't have a failure or major leak. The City televises the main sewers on a regular basis and we have seen defects in "new" sewer lines. It may take 100 years or more, but every lateral will eventually fail.

If my lateral fails or has a blockage and the backup of sewage causes damages in my basement, will the City reimburse me for this clean-up?

No. The City will not take responsibility for clean-up from a failed or blocked lateral. Most homeowner's insurance policies have some sewer back-up coverage. Check with your insurance agent to find out if you are adequately covered.

Why are residential properties being charged a fee and commercial and manufacturing properties are not?

Non-residential properties have a variety of sanitary systems serving the property and some are quite extensive. A standard fee for such a variety of conditions would be difficult to establish. The City will be monitoring for excessive flows from non-residential properties. If excessive flows are suspected, the non-residential property owner would be ordered to inspect and correct any problems with their sanitary lateral at their own cost.

How do we know that this fund won't be used for other things?

This fund will be held in an account specifically set up for work on private sanitary systems. Only expenses for work on private sanitary systems can be charged to the fund. This is similar to the current funds for the public sewer and water utilities.

Additional Questions received at the Public hearing and after:

Can the City guaranty that the fee will never change or at least not change for the next ten years?

The City can't guaranty that the fee will not change. The Common Council will review the fee annually to assure that the amount charged is appropriate to meet the program goals.

Can I choose to have my residential property not participate in the program?

No. If this program is passed by the Common Council, all residential properties will be in the program and will be billed \$10 per quarter. You can choose not to have a repair or rehabilitation on your lateral. The Special Assessments will only be charged if the property owner agrees to pay for an improvement to their lateral.

Why doesn't the City look for other funding sources to pay for this program?

West Allis continually looks for sources of funding to assist in this type of work. West Allis received grant money that allowed us to do a project on private sanitary systems in an area where the properties experienced excessive sewer back-ups during wet weather. The test project showed that work on the private sanitary systems results in significant reductions in flow in the mainline sanitary sewer.

The City will continue to seek outside funding sources to help in the funding of this work, but this program is a long term commitment and will need to have a funding source that is consistent and reliable in order to be successful.

Has the City considered the financial hardship that this fee may cause some property owners?

The City needs to address the flow problems whether we do it on the public system or the private systems. Most of the clear water is entering the system through the private systems. The cost to reduce flows by only improving the public system would be much higher and less effective. By addressing the private systems, which have the leakiest pipes, we will not only be able to reduce flows more efficiently, but we will be able to provide some protection for the property owner's lateral as well. This protection will reduce the potentially devastating financial impact to the property owner in the event of a lateral failure.

Are the City's sewer flow limits a result of MMSD allowing combined sewer flows that use up the capacity of the system?

No. Flow limits are necessary to keep the costs of the sewer system in check. If each community was allowed to put an unlimited amount of flow into MMSD's system, we would all be paying to expand their system to accommodate those flows. The flow limits were established to provide for a reasonable amount of flow from every area.

MMSD has the ability to divert flows from combined systems away from the deep tunnel to save capacity for the separated sanitary flow. Some combined system overflows are allowable under their wastewater discharge permit.

Will duplexes have to pay double fees?

No. The fee is based on the cost to rehabilitate or repair the service to the building. Each sanitary lateral will be assessed a fee. The lateral for a duplex or a three family is the same as laterals used for a single family, so the cost for repair or rehabilitation would be the same as for a single family. A multi family structure will use more water and have a higher water and sewer bill, but the amount of water leaking into the private system will be similar to a single family.

Why can't we just charge properties in the areas where the sanitary flows are over the allowable amounts?

It is clear from a review of properties experiencing sewer problems in past major rain storms that our sewer flow problems are not limited to the areas where flows exceed the allowed levels. Without rehabilitation efforts the amount of clear water entering our sanitary system will continue to increase throughout the city and more areas will exceed the allowable flow levels. This program will not only address the areas exceeding the flow limits. It will lower the risk of sewer back-up throughout the city.

Why can't we use insurance programs like Milwaukee or Madison to protect our lateral?

While insurance plans will protect the property owner from most of the costs of a lateral failure, they do not address the problem of clear water entering the system. The primary purpose of the proposed program is to reduce the flow in the sanitary system. The protection it provides to the property owner is an added benefit of the program.

What is the most common cause of lateral back-ups?

The most common cause of lateral back-ups is probably from roots growing into the pipe though failed joints or cracks. Other causes are from debris lodging in the pipe, a collapsed pipe, or the main sewer surcharging back into the lateral.

Why doesn't the City decide on this program by referendum?

The City chose to send information about the program to all property owners and encourage comments from them. The feedback from the property owners will be used to decide whether or not to proceed with the program.

Are foundation drains being addressed with this program?

Currently we are addressing foundation drain disconnection using funding from MMSD for private property I/I reduction. If MMSD funding ends, foundation drain disconnection may be added to this program in the future and an appropriate Special assessment for sump pump installation will be determined.

How does rain water get into my sanitary sewer?

Ground water gets into laterals through cracks in the pipe and leaking joints. Most sanitary laterals are clay tile pipe made up of 3' sections of pipe. The tar-like material used to seal the joints during installation seems to lose its effectiveness after 30 to 40 years. This allows sewage to leak out during dry weather and ground water to leak in when the ground is saturated. Other sources of clear water in sanitary laterals are connected foundation drains, illegal sump pump connections and illegal downspout connections.

Why doesn't the City look for illegal connections like sump pumps and down spouts to reduce flows?

West Allis periodically does testing to detect illegal connection using smoke detection, system televising and dyed water methods. We will continue to do testing in problem areas and when an illegal connection is suspected.

If my failed lateral was damaged by previous construction projects or utility work do I have to pay the Special Assessment?

No. When laterals are dug for repairs, the cause of the failure can be determined. If it is determined that the lateral had been damaged by city work or work done by other utilities, no Special Assessment would be charged.

Why does this program only cover the laterals to a point 6' from my house?

The rehabilitation of laterals will predominately be done by lining the existing pipe. A clean-out needs to be installed at the end of the lining for installation purposes and it would be difficult to excavate for the clean-out installation closer than 6' from the house. If the homeowner is willing to allow the contractor access to an existing clean-out in the basement, it would be possible to get the lining completed to that clean-out at no extra charge.

Why does the City plant trees in the terrace area close to the laterals when we know tree roots get into laterals?

When laterals are functioning properly tree roots cannot get into the pipe. Once the laterals develop leaks, the water leaking from the lateral attracts tree roots, especially during dry periods. Roots in a sanitary lateral are a good indication that the lateral has significant leaks.

Trees are an important asset to the city and to the quality of life of the residents, so the city will continue to plant trees in the terrace area. Rehabilitating the sanitary lateral will eliminate the leaks and intrusion of tree roots.