

Charter for City of Stevenson, Sewer Ordinance Committee
Approved: November 6, 2023

City of Stevenson Vision (from the Comprehensive Plan):

Those citizens have now spoken, and their vision for the future is to proudly look out their window, walk down their street, or return for a visit in 2030 and honestly say:

"Stevenson is a friendly, welcoming community that values excellent schools and a small-town atmosphere. The natural beauty is enjoyed by residents and visitors through a network of recreational opportunities. The strength of Stevenson's economy is built upon high quality infrastructure and a vibrant downtown that provides for residents' daily needs. Stevenson takes advantage of our unique location on the Columbia River by balancing jobs, commerce, housing, and recreation along the waterfront."

City of Stevenson Mission:

Stevenson is committed to investing in improved infrastructure, stewardship, community & human development. We will adapt, evolve, and progress to maintain our resilient and inviting small-town feel in an agile/nimble and fiscally responsible way.

Sewer Ordinance Committee Purpose Statement:

To learn from one another about the known impacts of amending the Stevenson's sewer ordinance. Provide recommendations, comments, or both on the proposed ordinance changes related to facilitating community sanitary services and meet the growing needs of Stevenson.

The City Council holds all final decision authority on the sewer ordinance but will review notes and recommendations from this committee.

History:

In 1972, with the adoption of the Clean Water Act, the City of Stevenson was required to establish a sewer collection system and treatment plant and associated requirements to connect and limitations on what was sent down the drain. The collection system has expanded over time with development (1979, 1993, 2005, 2016, etc.), and the plant was expanded in 1993 with the addition of Skamania Lodge.

In 2006, conversations with the Department of Ecology began leaning toward expanding the plant. Internal discussions focused on how to hold off expansion, leaning toward reducing what waste was sent to the plant through education and hiring an engineer to try to get DOE to re-rate the limits the plant could hold without any physical improvements at the plant.

In 2017 the City of Stevenson received an Administrative Order for regularly exceeding capacity at the wastewater treatment plant. This forced the city to upgrade the plant to handle the increased capacity and make other changes to the plant in line with current regulations, such as redundancy - typically, this means providing at least 2 of everything. Early cost estimates and rate proposals shocked the community, especially the beverage producers and other commercial users. In response, the City formed a committee to challenge the engineering assumptions and right-size our proposal. There was a robust process involving members of the community, commercial and industrial users to analyze the issue holistically and design the plant in the most cost-effective manner (<https://www.ci.stevenson.wa.us/planning/page/cerb-alternative-analysis>).

When the community learned of the \$16M price tag, and subsequent rates needed to meet the debt, the council recognized the need to shift from being reactive to proactive in the management of its capital assets. The City Council set a goal of creating a Capital Improvement Program (CIP) as part of this effort. In developing this program, all system plans are reviewed and overlaid with known areas of need, development or development potential.

In addition to being proactive in managing its assets, the council established goals which are reviewed annually and updated every few years. The projects outlined in the CIP are to further the overall goals and priorities of the council identified in their strategic plan. Themes that have come from the multiple planning sessions held since 2018 include housing and deliberate growth strategies. The link to council goals and the current strategic plan are found on the city website <https://www.ci.stevenson.wa.us/citycouncil/page/council-strategic-goals>.

One strategy to further these two themes is the expansion of sewer to city limits. This will share the rate burden across more users, allow for increased housing opportunities, and be a deliberate step toward growing the city. How that happens is where we are today.

Assumptions

The City...

- Strives to create a consistent and standard level of service for all Stevenson residents and is accountable for ensuring sanitary reliability and environmental health risk mitigation with managing costs for users of services.
- Aims to make decisions that benefit its residents' *collective* well-being and balance individual rights with the common good with a long term outlook of 50-100 years.
- Seeks to create an environment friendly to the density and intensity of development anticipated in the Comprehensive Plan and unfriendly to development counter to that plan.
- Needs to increase the number of sewer customers to share the financial, infrastructure and environmental stewardship responsibilities across more users.

The Committee ...

- has mixed interests, perspectives and motivations that will be identified.
- will aim to partner with the City to address the multitude of concerns, resulting in solutions or recommendations that benefit Stevenson residents' *collective* well-being and balance individual rights with the common good.

The Current Sewer Ordinance...

- Facilitates development which is contrary to the Comprehensive Plan's direction (discourage further development within an Urban Reserve until public services can be provided).
- Stifles development through uncoordinated decision-making at the lot-level and 5-30 year outlook.
- Overburdens existing ratepayers with the \$20M cost for a system ready to serve unsewered areas and future growth.

Goals of Committee from Staff -

1. Create shared understandings of the sewer and septic trends in our community.
2. Validate or identify the need to alter the 1972 Sewer Ordinance assumptions/decisions, 2013 Land Use/Development assumptions/decisions and 2019 Rate assumptions/decisions.
3. Surface the potential impacts of proposed changes to the 1972 Sewer Ordinance.
4. Recommend a proposal with the least negative impacts

Committee Identified Success Indicators

1. **Fair Infrastructure Improvement and Expansion:** *Success ensures equitable sharing of financial impacts that do not burden residents with exorbitant costs for transitioning from septic to sewer and extending sewer lines while supporting small private development. Note: concerns voiced regarding the definition of “equitable”*
2. **Informed Decision-Making:** Success means that the committee comprehensively understands the scope of the issue and various financing solutions, builds trust in the decision-making process, and recommends middle-ground positions that are determined legal.
3. **Inclusivity and Community Perspectives:** Success entails considering all perspectives on the impacts of potential changes to the sewer ordinance and refraining from making decisions that benefit single perspectives or individuals. Success is improving trust by ensuring the committee understands the process, is supported to generate ideas to address sewer issues, and people feel heard and their time is valued.

Process Steps -

1. Hear from the City about the history and assumptions related to the financial costs of \$20M in wastewater system upgrades.
2. Learn about the financial and functional impacts of the current proposal if the City takes no action.
3. Learn about current cost projections and rate impacts with various scenarios considered.
4. Review existing solutions to mitigate the financial impacts on residents while maintaining Stevenson’s vision and mission.
5. Hear from Committee members about the current proposal's pro’s and con’s from their perspective.
6. Brainstorm additional solutions for consideration.
7. The Committee will weigh in on all considered solutions for the City Council to consider by providing a Recommendations Report.

Scope—Included

- Sewer Ordinance
- Hook up solutions / cost mitigation measures

Scope—Excluded

- Comprehensive Plan - density discussions may result in opening the Comprehensive Plan for public discussion, but this Committee will not make any changes.
- Decisions related to the sewer ordinance.

Constraints

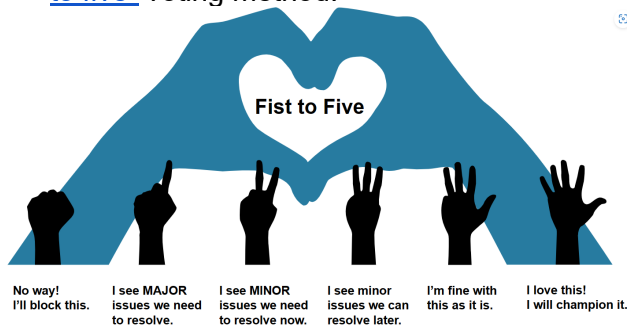
- Current moratorium prohibits new septic systems, preventing new building permit applications from being accepted for those wanting to be on septic.

Initial Risks

- If a decision isn't made by the end of February, the current moratorium on new septic connections will expire or need to be extended.

Decision Making/Process

- All decisions related to the Sewer Ordinance belong to the Stevenson City Council.
- The Committee will provide feedback and vote on various recommendations using a ["fist to five"](#) voting method.



Timeline

Meeting 1 - Committee Kickoff Charter and group agreements adopted Context is known: history, current proposal, reasoning and constraints Committee members - questions posed, concerns and early recommendations identified for consideration	October 30, 2023 2 hours
Meeting 2 - WORKSHOP Review of questions/concerns from first meeting Impact of no action understood Brainstorm recommendations or alternative solutions to current proposals.	November 6, 2023 3 hours
Meeting 3 - Recommendations / Wrap Up Review recommendations, known impacts, and feasibility and vote "fist to five" Next steps and timeline	TBD 90-120 min
Recommendations Report to Council	TBD

Participants

Convener: Stevenson City Council

Staff: City Administrator Leana Kinley, Public Works Director Carolyn Sourek, Community Development Director Ben Shumaker

Facilitator: Tracy Gratto

Consultant: FCS - consultant for rates

Name	Perspective/Interest	RSVP
1. Mark Peterson	Septic/History of issue	Yes
2. Shawn Van Pelt	Septic/Developer/Business Owner	Yes
3. Graham Gentry	Real Estate Agent	Yes
4. Steve Waters	Business Owner	Yes
5. Adam Miller	Extended line/Former septic	Yes
6. Jeff Breckel	Sewer/PC Chair/Environmental Aspect	Yes
7. Wes Houston	Property Owner-Septic	Yes
8. Rick Jessel	Septic	Yes
9. Karen Rutledge	Sewer/Septic conversion cost concern	Yes
10. Michael Johnson	Councilmember-Sewer	Yes
11. Dave Cox	Councilmember-Sewer	Yes
12. Scott Anderson	Mayor-Sewer	Yes
13. Brian McKenzie	Developer	Yes
14. Jenny Taylor	Sewer/Septic/Former Council Member/Port Commissioner	Yes
15. Gail Collins	Former PWD/Septic	Yes
16. Chuck Oldfield	Sewer	Yes
17. Rick May	New sewer/Former septic/developer	Yes