

Neighborhood Newsletter Article
CSO! Update

May 1, 2009

The Combined Sewer Overflow Study Makes A Few Changes

After three years of engineering study, refinement to assure the viability of solutions and community feedback regarding the unfunded federal mandate to reduce the number of combined sewer overflows in the Omaha metro area, the Long Term Control Plan (LTCP) is due to be submitted to the state by October 1, 2009.

More than 125 Omahans – business owners, neighborhood leaders, educators and community volunteers – have given their time and provided ideas and solutions to the experts to reduce the problem of raw sewage being released into the Missouri River or Papillion Creek during wet weather events.

Recently the Community Basin Panel and the Basin Advisory Panels who represent the neighborhoods who make up the ten basins directly impacted by the solutions, were briefed on the updated plan. New areas have been added for proposed sewer separation since the fall of 2008. Among those areas are the removal of creeks from the sewer system at Westlawn Hillcrest and the Bohemian cemetery in the Saddle Creek basin and Forest Lawn in the Minne Lusa basin. When construction is completed there will be an estimated 16 miles of new sanitary sewers, 61 miles of new storm sewers and 85 miles of existing sewers which will have been rehabilitated.

The proposed deep tunnel has also gone through some changes. The length of the tunnel has been reduced by nearly half a mile while the diameter of the tunnel increased from 12.5 feet to 17 feet. This reduces the number drop shafts into the tunnel as well.

Originally, the city thought there would be a need for three high-rate treatment plants to be built as part of the control solutions. They have reduced that number to two; one located at the Saddle Creek outfall emptying into the Papillion Creek and the other to be located adjacent to the Missouri River Wastewater Treatment plant. Two underground storage tanks – one at the Minne Lusa outfall and the other near Benson Park have been added to the plan to provide added assistance in reducing basement backups.

In addition to the “gray” solutions – or engineering solutions – several green solutions are part of the project. Three such solutions are either underway or scheduled early in the plan for Miller Park, Benson Park and Spring Lake Park. An additional dozen projects located on public land are also being considered for potential green solutions. There are three criteria for development of green solutions: it must be developed on public land; it must have a quantifiable impact on reducing the flow into the sewer system – in other words contribute to the solution, not just be attractive; and it must be cost effective.

This improvement to the city’s water quality does not come cheap. City officials have estimated the average amount homeowners would pay by the year 2017 would be approximately \$50. In fact, a study conducted by Red Oak Consulting, who specializes in utilities’ fees and who has consistently worked with the city, confirmed the rates city officials have projected.

Currently, the average residential customer pays about \$14 per month for sewer service. That amount is set to increase by about \$1.25 per month next year under the current rate plan. Under a new rate structure, to be considered by the Omaha City Council, those average residential rates would rise to \$37.23 by 2014.

While much of the work on these infrastructure projects won't be seen by the general population, there are community enhancements that will result from the work, such as trails, educational exhibits, green space, playgrounds and sport courts and fields – funded not as part of the CSO program but through matching funds or grants.

Public meetings are scheduled to be held during the summer to obtain additional public input prior to the submission of the final long term control plan on October 1, 2009. For more information visit www.omahacso.com or call the CSO hotline at 402-341-0235.