

CITY PLANS FOR AGING SEWERS

Just about everyone in Reno uses the City's sewer system at home or work when they flush a toilet, take a shower or do laundry. It's one of those hidden infrastructures that we'd have a hard time living without.

In Reno there are more than 673 miles of sewer lines that carry sewage from homes, businesses and public entities to waste water treatment facilities - the Truckee Meadows Water Reclamation Facility, the Stead Water Treatment Plant or the South Truckee Meadows Water Reclamation Facility depending on the locale.

Reno is now facing similar issues to what it did with its neighborhood street program. Just as the City had to develop a plan to handle a backlog of streets in older neighborhoods in need of repairs and replacement, it now needs to repair or replace old deteriorated sewer lines. Reno's Sanitary Engineer Greg Dennis says that 86 miles of sewer lines are more than 60 years old. Another 106 miles are 40 to 60 years old. The backlog for repairing the old pipe totals around 108 miles of sewer line. Other large diameter interceptor pipe are also in need of rehabilitation.

Need for New Sewer Rate Plan

Dennis says the City began collecting data in 1995 on the condition of the sewers. Employees take video pictures of the sewer lines. The information gathered from this work is used to develop and maintain a cost effective maintenance plan for the future. "We now know we will need about \$20 million a year to do repair and replacement of the collection system," says Dennis. He is working with the City's Finance Director to establish sewer use rate and connection fees that are earmarked to the sewer enterprise fund to provide for the future of the City's sewer infrastructure.

In 1999, the City Council increased sewer rates to pay for major construction work at both water reclamation

facilities to improve technology and environmental aspects, to repair and replace outdated parts of the facility and provide for future growth.

Fund Provides Environmental Sustainability

The City's sewer enterprise fund pays for the operation and maintenance of the two sewer plants as well as all of the sewer lines, storm drains and ditches. It also pays for effluent reuse on golf courses and regional parks. Since Reno and Sparks discharge effluent to the Truckee River the fund also supports projects to improve water quality through environmental improvements to the river such as river restoration. The City has contributed funds to help match grant monies for the Nature Conservancy's River Restoration projects. These projects help insure that the river's water quality is maintained down stream of the Truckee Meadows Water Reclamation Facility. "This really goes back to your pocketbooks," says Dennis. "When we maintain the environmental integrity of the river, we can discharge treated effluent back to the river," says Dennis.



Issue Went Before Reno City Council

Dennis took the proposed plan for new sewer use fee rates and connection fees to the City Council on May 25, 2005. The current rate for a single family residence is \$19.40 a month. The council determined what the rate increase would be based on staff recommendations and reviews by the Financial Advisory Board and the Sewer Rate Advisory Board. Dennis says residents here pay a lot less in sewer rates than other cities. "I did an average of 37 cities and the average sewer bill was \$42 a month. We are about in the middle when compared to other cities in Nevada," says Dennis. "The older the city, the older the sewer lines will be. Our city is getting older too and we now have 86 miles of pipe that have passed their life and need to be replaced," said Dennis.