Private Sewer Lateral Program coming to the City Council on August 20!

The City owns and maintains approximately 145 miles of sewer mains. In California, public agencies are required by the State Water Resources Control Board to maintain the public portion of wastewater systems to minimize the likelihood of sanitary sewer overflows. Maintenance of City-owned sewer lines includes scheduled cleaning, inspection/condition assessment, and prioritized replacement of defective lines to make them structurally sound. No similar statewide program exists for property owners to regularly clean, inspect, or otherwise maintain private laterals. Most often, property owners only attend to laterals in cases of complete stoppages or emergency failure.

The City estimates there are over 145 miles of private sewer laterals within its boundaries. The property owner is responsible for maintenance, including repair and replacement of the sewer lateral. Many homes and buildings in the City were built before 1950 and many still have their original sewer laterals. Older sewer laterals can create problems for property owners because over time they deteriorate, leading to the pipe cracking, leaking, blocking, or breaking.

Staff is proposing a Private Sewer Lateral Program for City Council consideration on August 20, 2019. The staff report is available at the following link (Item 13 on the Agenda):

https://www.slocity.org/Home/ShowDocument?id=23272.

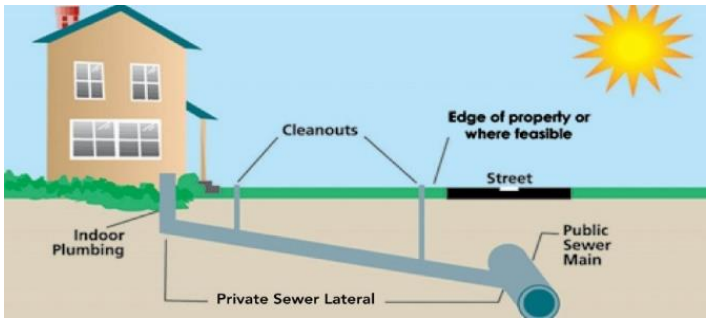
The proposed Program includes **new rebates** for single family residences replacing their sewer lateral (if adopted, rebates would be available for work completed following the August 20 hearing date), and Municipal Code amendment that include sewer lateral Inspection requirements, including inspection upon sale of a property, and wastewater offset requirements.

If you need more information or have other questions, please contact Jeremy Gearhart at 805-781-7033.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is a private sewer lateral?

A private sewer lateral is the pipe that connects a building's plumbing system to the City's public sewer main, which is typically located in the street. The sewer lateral begins at the junction with the building's plumbing system, which is typically located within two feet of the building's foundation wall, extends to the public sewer main, and includes the connection to the public sewer main. The property owner is responsible for maintenance and repairs on the entire sewer lateral and the connection to the public sewer main.



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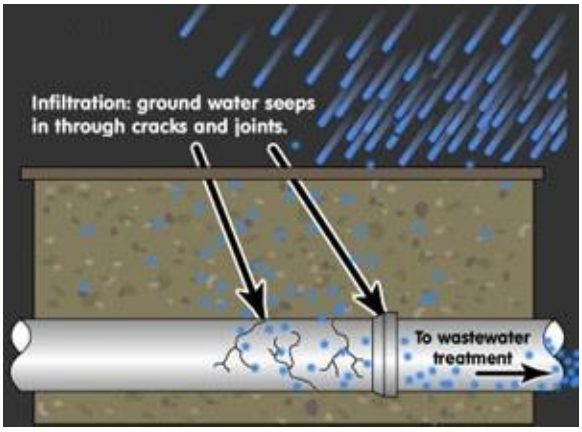
2. What is Inflow and Infiltration (I/I)?



Inflow is rainfall that enters private sewer laterals and the City's wastewater collection system through a direct connection, such as a downspout or an area drain. Direct connections are illegal, and the City requires that these connections are removed whenever they are found.

Infiltration is rainfall that enters private sewer laterals and the City's wastewater collection system from the soil surrounding the pipe. During wet weather, rainfall accumulates as groundwater and enters the wastewater collection system in higher levels than in dry weather. In some areas of the City this flow is more than 20 times normal flow. The City is always looking for ways to reduce its I/I levels, and the Private Sewer Lateral program is designed to help reduce infiltration.

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3. Why is reducing Inflow and Infiltration so important?

High levels of inflow and infiltration (I/I) can cause Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) during wet weather. An SSO is when untreated sewage flows out of the collection system before it reaches the City's Water Resource Recovery Facility for treatment.

High I/I levels can also cause unnecessary treatment costs because rainwater is unnecessarily treated when the flow reaches the wastewater treatment plant. This could raise the sewer service rates for all ratepayers if I/I is not mitigated. High levels of I/I are a threat to public health, requires costly upgrades to the wastewater infrastructure, and has, at times, contaminated San Luis Obispo Creek.

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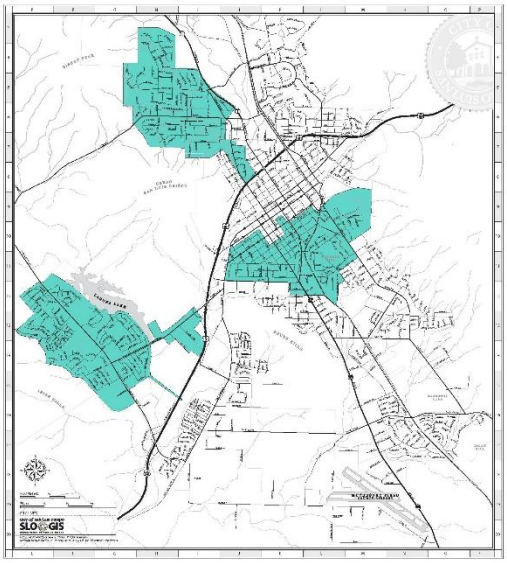
4. Does the City have an I/I problem?



According to industry standards, the City has severe levels of I/I. Nationally, a typical Peak Wet Weather Flow (PWWF) to Average Daily Weather Flow (ADWF) ratio above 3.5 is considered high. In San Luis Obispo, collection systems with PWWF-to-ADWF ratios above five are common, and ratios above eight or nine are considered very high. During flow monitoring in 2010 and 2011, consultants found that some areas of the City have a PWWF-to-ADWF ratio of over 13 in some areas during storm events.

Some areas of the City have capacity constraints due to I/I during storm events.

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5. What has the City done to reduce I/I?

The City cleans, inspects, repairs, and replaces public sewer mains on a routine basis. Some sewer lines require cleaning as frequently as every two months. City staff have identified significant I/I sources while conducting routine CCTV inspections and worked with residents to correct them.

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6. Who are rebates available to?

As part of the Private Sewer Lateral Program, staff is proposing funding for rebates to single-family residential property owners to defray a portion of the costs in replacing their private sewer lateral. The rebate for any one sewer lateral replacement is a maximum of $2,000 (up to 50 percent of the cost); $3,000 (up to 50 percent of the cost) is offered in capacity constrained areas of the City. Staff is also proposing to eliminate a portion of the City permit fees for all lateral replacements that equals a $531 reduction in cost in 2019.

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7. When will the rebates available?

If approved by the City Council on August 20, rebates would be available immediately. Rebates would only be provided when funds are allocated for that purpose within a given budget year. Rebates are proposed to be available on a first come, first serve basis by date of application until the funds are expended. The rebate program is not proposed to be retroactive.

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8. Why is the City beginning a Private Sewer Lateral Program now?

The City has been concerned about its I/I levels for decades. Through this program, the City is proactively working to reduce I/I levels and SSOs. The City is already working towards this goal by maintaining and monitoring public sewer mains. However, the sewer mains receive their flow from the approximately 145 miles of private sewer laterals that are connected to the City's collection system and are not maintained or monitored by the City. Despite the City's investment into improving the wastewater infrastructure, there has not been a dramatic reduction in I/I during wet weather. This has led the City to conclude that a large portion of its I/I is from sewer laterals.

Over the last decade, the EPA and the California Regional Water Quality Control Board have sued several wastewater agencies to fix their damaged sewer pipes and reduce sanitary sewer overflows. As a result, Private Sewer Lateral Programs have become relatively common throughout California. The City has not been sued by the EPA or California Regional Water Quality Control Board because the number of SSOs is below the California average. The City strives to achieve a zero-tolerance for sewage spills, overflows, and other problems that pose a hazard to public health and the environment.

9. When is a property owner required to have a sewer lateral inspection?

In the proposed ordinance, the events triggering a sewer lateral inspection include:

a. Private sewer overflow,
b. Building permit applications for the addition of a bathroom or kitchen in a residential structure,
c. Building permit applications for the addition of non-residential space or an additional plumbing fixture unit in non-residential structures,
d. Increase in the size of the domestic water meter serving a property or adding a new domestic water meter,
e. Specific changes in use,
f. When a property is subdivided,
g. When smoke testing or CCTV inspection by the City indicates the presence of I/I from a private sewer lateral impacting the public wastewater collection system.
h. Change in ownership of real property.

In the proposed ordinance, events "a" through "g" listed above would require corrective action if defects are identified in the private sewer lateral. For event "h," change of ownership, only the lateral inspection is required (not corrective actions). The disclosure of the condition of the lateral is part of the change in ownership transaction. Any repairs performed would be negotiated between the buyer and seller. The lateral CCTV inspection would be provided to the City. Any repairs performed would be negotiated between the buyer and seller. The lateral CCTV inspection would be provided to the City. The effective date for the new inspection requirements triggered by a change of ownership is **January 1, 2020**.

The Program applies to all residential, commercial, mixed use, industrial, and institutional properties. The ordinance also includes provisions for common interest properties.

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10. When would a City property owner not be required to have a sewer lateral inspection?

An inspection **would not** be required if the property meets any of the following conditions:

a. If the property is less than 20 years old.
b. If the property's sewer lateral was replaced in full within 20 years of January 1, 2020.

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11. How long is the Private Sewer Lateral Inspection valid?

Under the proposed ordinance, if the property owner is required to inspect the private sewer lateral, the inspection is valid for **five** years.

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12. Is the buyer or the seller be responsible for the sewer lateral compliance?

The current property owner is ultimately responsible for sewer lateral compliance. Under the proposed ordinance, it is up to the buyer and the seller to negotiate this in escrow and provide the CCTV inspection to the City.
