

Water flow data will determine long-term sewer plan

Written by [Kevin Kelley](#) on December 4, 2014

Fairview Park

Water flow measurements from the city's sewer system will be used to determine what large-scale sewer projects are needed to reduce flooding problems, city officials said Nov. 24.

At a City Council committee meeting, Mayor Eileen Patton, service Director Rob Berner and city engineer Michael Mackay discussed a report from Black & Veatch, a consultant hired to evaluate the city's flooding problems.

A major recommendation of Black & Veatch is the creation of a computer model of the city's sanitary sewer system. Seven water flow meters will be installed at various locations to determine the sewer system's capacity on dry days in comparison to days with heavy storms.

Dianne Sumego, a project manager with Black & Veatch, said the flow data and computer model will answer important questions about the current state of the sewer system: "Is it sized properly? Is it running full? How does it impact when it rains? Is there the potential for backups or not?"

The plan is to begin the flow meter measurements in the spring and finish by mid- to late-summer.

Therefore, Berner said, city officials won't know what capital improvements to the sewer system are needed or how much they will cost until the middle of 2015.

"We can't tell you tonight what those specific projects are going to be," Berner told council members. "But what we do know is that there are going to be projects that are going to need to be done."

Based on the needs identified by the computer model, a master plan will be developed consisting of prioritized improvement projects to be implemented over several years, Berner said.

In the meantime, city officials will explore potential funding sources for future projects. Although he said nothing is being ruled out, Berner said it's too early to discuss any potential increase in residents' sewer rates.

"The worst thing we should do is go out and raise sewer rates without a plan," the service director said. "And that is not our intention."

Patton said the plan recommended by Black & Veatch is "a brand-new approach" for the city. The intent is to focus on the western end of the city, which has experienced more episodes of flooding, the mayor noted.

The city's past actions to solve sewer problems, including the investment of approximately \$9 million during the past 15 years, were not in vain and indeed helpful, Berner said. The service director added that

continued maintenance of the sewers is important to keep them working efficiently and free of obstructions.

But, Berner said the new approach goes beyond mere maintenance and is proactive in focusing on long-term improvements instead of repairs.

“What we’re going to do differently, quite honestly, is we’re going to be proactive in actually instead of just maintaining what we have, we need to start making capital expenditures to improve what we have,” Berner said.

The city paid Black & Veatch \$7,500 to develop its initial list of recommendations, Berner said. Additional work, including the flow readings and development of the computer model, will require further expenditures, he said.