

HIGHLAND TOWNSHIP SANITARY SEWER SERVICE

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

When will sewers be available in my neighborhood? Sewer availability depends upon the response of the property owners in your area. Sewer service *cannot* be made available until the wastewater treatment plant is constructed, which is anticipated for October, 2007.

Is public water available too? The Township is undertaking some water system improvements that will allow us to extend water to places not previously served. If your neighborhood is in need of public water, we will investigate the feasibility of providing that service too.

How are the sewers (or water) financed? Sanitary sewer (or watermain) projects will be financed through Special Assessment Districts (SAD's) initiated by petition from property owners. When an SAD is established, the Township may sell bonds to cover the construction costs, and bill the property owners annually for their portion. This assessment shows up on your tax bill, and is due with your tax payment.

How much will my assessment be? Until we have a better idea of who is interested in sewers, and what their other specific needs might be (such as watermain improvements or specific road issues that need to be addressed during construction of the sewers), we can only speak in general ranges. The range is very broad –anywhere from \$10,000 to \$13,000 per home depending upon the assumptions of who gets served when. Watermain costs are even more uncertain until specific service areas are identified. These costs might range from \$5000 to \$8000 per home.

What about other costs, such as a connection fee and user fees? Each property owner will incur some additional cost for his physical connection to the sewer and disconnection of his septic system. This is typically not part of the project, and you may contract with anyone you choose to handle the pipes from your home to the mainline sewer. Your costs will obviously depend on how close your home is to the street or sewer easement. We have been told that residents on similar systems have seen costs ranging from \$500 to \$2500 per home.

The Township has not determined whether there will be a “connection” fee separate from the sewer, or if so, what that amount would be. There will also be a bill (probably quarterly) to pay for operations and maintenance of the system. We will attempt to quantify those costs before the first public hearings are held.

Aren't there any grants or government programs to help pay for the sewers? Many years ago, the federal government did provide money for bringing sewers to unserved areas. Policy shifted to a more regulatory approach, leaving communities to fend for themselves. There is one possible funding program (State Revolving Fund Loan), which provides a low-interest loan to communities who can demonstrate a pollution problem and meet criteria to prove the sewers are not there to fuel economic development or urban sprawl. This may be a possibility in the lakes areas if there is sufficient interest and we can document failing septic systems as a factor contributing to public health threats and/or environmental degradation.

If there is sufficient interest around the lakes, we may pursue this route, recognizing that there are added engineering studies, review and approval time that add a year or more to the project. We must also recognize that we are not necessarily a “perfect” candidate for that program, and the project plan could add time and cost to the project without achieving the goal of priority funding.

Will I be “forced” to connect to the sewer system? First recognize that the Township is not advocating sewers in any specific location. We have prepared a master sewer feasibility study that shows the limits of where we are willing to extend sewer, based on public feedback from forums held in 1999.

If a majority of the property owners in your area sign a petition requesting sewers, and it is determined that sewers can be feasibly provided at an acceptable cost, the sewers will be extended into that area. If your property is included in the assessment roll, you will be billed for your annual assessment, whether you connect immediately or not.

If your home or business is within 200 feet of an available sewer, you will be required to connect within a specified time. If your property is near the sanitary sewers, but you were not included in the assessment roll, the Oakland County Health Department may choose not to allow you to repair a damaged septic system or construct a new one, but may require you to instead connect to the municipal system.

Who will operate the system? How will I be billed for service? The Township has made no decisions as to who will operate the system. Initially, the most likely scenario is for the Township to contract for operations with either Oakland County or a private operator. The operator will most likely be responsible for preparing quarterly bills for service, based on a flat rate for areas with no public water system, or based on actual usage for areas with public water service. Other nearby communities charge between \$45 and \$90 per quarter per home for sanitary sewer service

Will I be served by gravity sewer or a grinder pump station? How you will be served depends largely on the lay of the land around your neighborhood. In many lakes areas, it is most cost effective to use a low-pressure grinder pump station, where every home or a small group of homes are served by a pump station. The obvious drawback is that you have to strictly limit water usage (toilet flushing for instance) if the power goes out. One obvious advantage is that it causes less disruption in a neighborhood during construction.

Does each home get its own grinder pump station? In most cases, each home gets its own grinder pump station. This way, you don’t have to be concerned if your neighbor is less responsible than you in operating the system. In any case, the pump stations will be part of the utility system—owned and operated by the system, not by the homeowner.

What comes next? All sanitary sewer extension projects will be property owner initiated. The Township is prepared to assist with creating petitions, refining cost estimates and route alternatives, and providing informal informational meetings for neighborhoods and homeowners associations.

If you are interested in circulating petitions or serving on a public information subcommittee, please contact the Township.

For more information on how to get involved contact:

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Watch our website for more information <http://www.highlandtwp.com>,
Click on Govt. and then on Planning Department