

# CITY OF PORTLAND



## BUREAU OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Sam Adams, Commissioner ▪ Dean Marriott, Director



## BUREAU OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

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The Bureaus of Environmental Services and Development Services are working together to address property issues involving party sewers. Answers to some frequently asked questions (FAQs) about party sewers are provided below.

### **What is a party sewer?**

A party sewer is a privately owned sewer line shared by two or more properties. These lines commonly access the public sewer system through a private sewer line located in the public right-of-way or a private line crossing through adjacent privately owned properties. The City estimates that 3,000 to 4,000 properties may be served by party sewers.

### **How do I know if I have a party sewer?**

Unfortunately, complete records of all party sewers do not exist. Party sewers are more common in areas of the City with older infrastructure. City plumbing and other records of sewer connection may provide some useful information. City plumbing records may be obtained from the Bureau of Development Services, Resource/Records located at 1900 SW 4<sup>th</sup> Ave., Portland, OR 97201 or by calling (503) 823-7660.

A video sewer line inspection may be necessary to verify whether a property is connected to a party sewer. A video sewer line inspection involves inserting a flexible cable with a video camera attached to its tip into the sewer line. The camera transmits video images of the inside of the line and a permanent recording can be made. A video sewer line inspection is also useful for assessing the condition of the sewer line. Video sewer line inspections are typically performed by private plumbing contractors or property inspection services.

### **Do party sewers conform to current code requirements?**

No. The Uniform Plumbing Code requires each property to have an independent connection and legal route of access to the public sewer.

Additionally, Portland City Code (PCC) 17.33.105 requires the abandonment of a non-conforming sanitary sewer connection within 180 days of providing notice to affected property owners of the availability of individual and direct sanitary sewer connections.

### **Does a change in a home's ownership trigger a requirement to disconnect a party sewer?**

No. A change in a home's ownership alone does not trigger a requirement to disconnect a party sewer. If, however, the City becomes aware of a party sewer through the inspection process of a real estate transaction or other means, the affected property owners will be notified and may be required to disconnect as described further below.

### **Are existing party sewers allowed to remain in service?**

Existing party sewers may be allowed to remain if a proper, legally recorded permanent private sewer easement and maintenance agreement between the owners of the properties served by the party sewer has been recorded prior to January 2, 2008. A property owner may lose use of a party sewer line if no such easements have been recorded. Each property owner will then be required to connect separately to the public sewer. The other exception to existing party sewers remaining in service is through the future public sewer extension process described briefly below.

The City will not approve new party sewer lines or repair of existing party sewer lines when public sewer is considered "immediately available". When no further extension of the public sewer is required to serve a property, property owners are required to build new branches from their homes to the existing public sewer main line or service lateral.

The public sewer is also considered "available" if it is within 100 feet or 1/2 block of any affected properties. If you need to repair your party sewer line and you are within 100 ft or 1/2 block of a public sewer, you will be required to pay for a public sewer extension to the existing public sewer in order to provide for a separate and direct connection.

### **What is the City doing about party sewers?**

Depending on the location in the City, the property owners may be able to defer expenses for participating in a public sewer extension. If the City has determined that it will be constructing a new public sewer in the future, the property owners may be allowed to replace the existing party sewer line by recording a temporary easement and maintenance agreement and signing a Public Sewer Utility Waiver that states they agree to pay applicable conversion fees and connect to the public sewer in the future. This alternative approach requires that affected property owners agree upon the terms of the temporary easement and maintenance agreements amongst one another.

### **What if I'm considering buying a property and I suspect it may be served by a party sewer?**

It is generally recommended that a video sewer line inspection of a property's sewer line be completed prior to a sale agreement. The video sewer line inspection will provide information on the condition of the sewer line, any repairs that may be necessary and also confirm whether the property is connected to a party sewer line.

### **What does it cost to disconnect a party sewer and construct a separate sewer connection?**

The cost of disconnecting a party sewer and/or constructing a new sewer connection is dependent on many factors specific to each property. Cost estimates may be obtained from licensed plumbing contractors.

### **Is there any financial assistance available through the City?**

The Bureau of Environmental Services offers financing for private plumbing costs and city sewer fees, if applicable. Qualification for these loans is not based on income or credit history. These loans have a fixed interest rate, low set up cost and monthly repayment schedules of 5, 10 and sometimes 20 years. Additionally, there is no prepayment penalties associated with early payoff. Also, under the Safety Net Loan Program we offer low-interest loans with deferred payment options to owner occupants who meet low-income qualifications.

### **Where can I get more information about party sewers?**

The City is prepared to discuss possible resolutions available through the existing Rules and to assist you with the process. Please contact the BES Party Sewer Hotline at 503-823-7869 to discuss issues over the telephone or to schedule an appointment to meet at City offices or at a specific property.

Additional FAQ's are currently under development by the Bureau of Environmental Services and the Bureau of Development Services team and will be available soon. These updates will include further answers to other non-conforming sewer situations, such as private sewers in the right-of-way.