

Coburg Wastewater System Information Sheet

Why Does Coburg Need Sewers?

Groundwater Contamination. Coburg's wastewater now goes into the ground where it, along with other sources, is suspected of contributing to elevated nitrate levels in wells to the north and west of Coburg. The City's wells are "downstream" of some parts of Coburg. Well tests have shown elevated levels of nitrates in all the wells "downstream" of Coburg, including some wells at unsafe levels of nitrate contamination. This has caused the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality to declare a groundwater management area for Coburg and the contaminated area "downstream" of Coburg¹.

Constraints on Growth. Because Coburg is on septic tanks, there are obstacles to building and remodeling. To build a new structure in Coburg, a property owner must have room for a functioning septic tank drainfield and a backup drainfield. This requires a minimum lot size of 10,000 square feet. Recent construction has been allowed on smaller lots only because plans have moved forward for a sewer system in Coburg. This construction restriction can apply to remodeling or the addition of "mother-in-law" apartments/cottages.

What Kind of System is Coburg Planning to Build?

Type of System is Determined by Outfall. The key issue for selecting a sewer system for Coburg is: "What do we do with the wastewater we collect and treat?" The City explored four possible "Outfall" options: putting the treated water in the McKenzie River or the Willamette River, piping raw sewage to the Metropolitan Wastewater Management Commission Treatment Plant on River Avenue in Eugene, or a combination of irrigation and outfall to Muddy Creek. It is the irrigation/Muddy Creek option that proved to be the least expensive, even though it requires the highest grade of treatment for the output.

A Septic Tank Effluent Pump System (A STEP System). To achieve that high grade of effluent, the City has selected a STEP Sewer System with a Membrane Treatment Plant. Wastewater will flow from your house or building to a septic tank on your property. The tank will have an electric pump that will pump the liquid wastes out of the tank into a City-wide collection system. The collection pipes will terminate at a treatment plant about 2,000 feet north of Monaco's factory on Industrial Way. The City plans to own and maintain the residential STEP sewer systems.

What Will this System Cost to Build? The current (November, 2009) budget for the project is \$25.5 million. Confirmed funding for the project is 25% grants and 72% loans and 3% Urban Renewal Agency funds. The financial plan is being evaluated by a key funding partner, the US Department of Agriculture, and indications are that they may be able to increase the grant portion to 37%.

What Will all this Cost a Homeowner?

Two Expenses. The current financial plan puts two costs on the owner of a house in Coburg: a sewer rate and an LID assessment. According to the financial plan (not yet enacted by City Council) the sewer rate might start this year at a level of about \$56. This would reduce the City's borrowing and thus the rates during operation. The assessment will not be due until the sewer is up and running (est. 2012) and is planned to be in the \$1,000 to \$2,000 range per house. This, too, has yet to be enacted by Council. When it is assessed homeowners will have the option of paying it in one lump sum or financing it through the City. These two expenses, a monthly rate and an assessment, are interdependent: the higher the assessment the lower the rate and vice versa. City Council will take this into consideration when it acts on these two pocket book issues.

A City-wide election on the sewer system will be held on March 9th and ballots should be mailed on February 19th. For more information on the project, Contact Don Schuessler, the City Administrator at 682-7871 or Craig Gibbons, the Project Manager, at 682-7870.

¹ For complete information see: <http://gwma.oregonstate.edu/>