Memorandum

DATE: May 16, 2019

TO: Water Commission

FROM: Gaylen Fair, Acting Wastewater System Manager

SUBJECT: Sewer Lateral Inspection Program Update

RECOMMENDATION:

That Water Commission receive an update on the Sewer Lateral Inspection Program, specifically updates on enhanced communication, cost controls, and inspection requirement frequency.

DISCUSSION:

Background

The City of Santa Barbara operates and maintains a 256-mile wastewater collection system with sewer mains that range in size from 6 to 46 inches in diameter. This publicly owned infrastructure is maintained by a combination of City staff and private contractors. Approximately 25,000 privately owned sewer laterals connect private property plumbing fixtures to the City’s wastewater collection system. Unfortunately, many of these laterals are old, poorly maintained, or damaged. The age and material of the sewer lateral can be vulnerable to roots, which may cause blockages and backups within the sewer lateral or within the City’s sewer system. In 2018, there were 26 private sewer lateral spills that the City was made aware of, some of which reached public water ways. Staff estimates there are more than 300 miles of private sewer laterals in the City.

The City expends significant resources to operate and maintain City-owned mains and has been successful in reducing sewer overflows. However, without routine maintenance on private laterals, the City’s ability to sustain the reduction and further reduce overflows will not be achievable. Failing private sewer laterals result in water intrusion into the sewer system and opportunities for root intrusion, both of which can lead to raw sewage overflows into local streets, storm drains, and creeks.

The Sewer Lateral Inspection Program (SLIP) was created in 2006 to target failing private laterals and increase public awareness of the need to maintain private laterals. The SLIP Ordinance No. 5396 requires property owners to inspect their laterals in the following situations:
• Prior to issuance of a building permit for addition of:
  o 400 square feet or more; or
  o Two or more new plumbing fixtures;
• Chronic problems – if the lateral has been blocked more than once in a 12-month period;
• When there is a private lateral sewer discharge;
• When a defect is identified by smoke testing;
• When, during inspection of City main lines, roots, excess clear water, or other problems are identified as coming from the lateral;
• Once every ten years for all commercial properties, condominiums, and other properties with three or more dwellings sharing private sewer pipes; and
• Upon direction of the Public Works Director, when there is reasonable cause to believe there may be a problem with, or illegal connection to, the sewer lateral.

In November 2006, Council passed a resolution to encourage property owners to proactively maintain their private sewer lateral by offering an incentive of $150 to inspect their sewer lateral, and a rebate of up to $2,000 and waiving of permit fees if the lateral needed to be repaired or replaced. The incentives were very popular with residents; however, after several years of growth with the SLIP, it was determined the $1.5 million annual program would require a 7% rate increase to generate the revenue necessary to support it. Additionally, the original goal of the SLIP to subsidize costs for homeowners was being undermined by the skyrocketing prices for repair work, negating the incentive the City was offering.

In December 2010, Council eliminated cash incentives for SLIP. As an alternative to the incentive, the City would continue to waive City permit fees in instances where property owners are required to repair or replace their lateral. At that time, this reduced the annual cost of the program to $150,000.

The SLIP has operated through this model for the better part of a decade; however, the number of private sewer laterals needing inspection and/or repair has increased tremendously. In 2010, it was estimated that 75 property owners per year would require lateral inspection or repair. In 2012, the City initiated a program to inspect the entire collection system within ten years via robotic Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) equipment. The CCTV data collected on the City’s sewer mains also gave staff new information concerning the condition of private laterals and specifically their connection to the City’s sewer mains. This information resulted in a sizeable increase in SLIP inspection notices. In 2018, over 850 property owners were required to have their laterals inspected, and of those 850, over 500 were required to repair or replace their sewer lateral. It is this surge in activity that has staff reviewing all aspects of the SLIP for ways to improve communication and education, and to provide cost controls and financial assistance.
Enhanced Communication

The increase in active SLIP cases has left a large number of property owners with many questions and limited information about why they are receiving a letter requiring inspection and what the next steps are. The lack of available information about the SLIP and limited staff resources for individual assistance has a negative impact on public perception of the City and the program.

In fall 2018, the City entered into a contract with a Katz & Associates (Katz), a public relations firm specializing in strategic communication, public involvement, and community relations. With the help of Katz, City staff has completed the following:

- Revised inspection notification letters
- Pamphlets explaining the process for both inspection and repair
- Infographics of lateral ownership and lateral life expectancy

Another essential aspect of enhanced communication with the public is the development of a new SLIP website. The new website, which went live on March 11, 2019, describes the SLIP, highlighting ownership and maintenance responsibilities, the life expectancy of a sewer lateral, inspection triggers, and repair options. The new website also has a Frequently Asked Questions section to assist the public with common questions about the program.

The City recognizes there is still a need for individual support for property owners as they navigate the process. Staff has implemented the following for public assistance:

- Regular office hours: 3rd Wednesday every month from 5:00-7:00 p.m.
- Realtor Training: Semi-annual presentations

By offering individualized customer service, staff will have the opportunity to earn the trust and high regard of the community, modeling the program after the free water check-up program.

Financial Assistance

Unlike a leaking roof, a defective lateral typically cannot be seen by the untrained eye. When property owners are informed they need to repair a defective lateral, it often comes as a surprise, and property owners are unprepared for such a major expense. Although some have the financial means or the option to obtain a home equity line of credit, some property owners may not have the equity in their home, or are on a fixed income, or cannot qualify for a personal loan. To reduce the burden of such a large expense, the City has researched options to assist property owners, such as low-interest loans; however, this option is challenging for several reasons, including Proposition 218 funding limitation, risk of loan default, and administration and loan services. Staff is still exploring options with the City Finance Department.
The incentive program the City offered from 2006 to 2010 was well received by the public; however, the wastewater fund was unable to keep up with the demand, and Proposition 218 restricted the City’s ability to disperse funds based upon need/income. Based on the size of the SLIP today, substantial double-digit increases to rates would be required, which is not an option being explored at this time given the proposed rate increases needed to keep up with replacement of critical wastewater capital infrastructure.

Cost Control

Even if a property owner can afford the repair or replacement of their sewer lateral, the variability in quotes from different plumbing contractors can be confusing. The uniqueness of each property and sewer lateral leads to an extreme variability in the costs for both inspection and repair. To compound the frustration, many will inquire with family, friends, and neighbors only to find out their costs were significantly different without understanding why.

Since 2013, City staff has managed a contract with a local contractor to replace the connection from the private sewer lateral to the sewer main, ensuring it is done in a quality manner. Staff has evaluated related work items to help simplify the SLIP process and provide competitive pricing for customers. That contract is currently out to bid and the two options included are:

- Option 1: Sewer Tap/Wye Replacement (Class A contractor)
- Option 2: Sewer Tap/Wye Replacement with Excavation (Class A contractor)

Staff is also developing specifications for an inspection and cleaning services contract going out to bid in June 2019. With these two contracts, the public will have a baseline for what the costs should be to perform these types of services. Of course, they can also shop the costs around to see if they can do better, but it does provide a market check and balance.

Inspection Requirement Frequency

When the SLIP was being developed in 2005, various options for requiring commercial and residential laterals to be inspected were explored. For commercial properties where the wastewater flows and strength can be much greater, a 10-year inspection frequency was adopted. For residential properties several options were being explored including a requirement for inspection when the property was sold. At the time this was brought forward, the City was headed into recession, and the real estate market was facing significant uncertainty, so no requirements were adopted. On March 21, 2019, the Water Commission received an update on the SLIP and made comments supporting the inspection of laterals upon sale of a property. The Commission encouraged staff to connect with the Realtors Association to recommence conversation about requiring inspection upon sale of a property. With limited staffing resources and a long list of program changes being made to the SLIP, this is an item slated for discussion in 2020.
Conclusion

There are numerous concerns and hurdles to overcome as the SLIP is being overhauled. Staff has made significant progress with new public outreach materials and developing cost controls; however, there is still more to be done. Once those efforts are wrapped up and staffing resources are available, we will be shifting our attention to examining and developing financial assistance options and inspection frequency requirements.
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
WATER RESOURCES DIVISION - WASTEWATER
SEWER LATERAL INSPECTION PROGRAM UPDATE

Water Commission – May 16, 2019
Presentation Overview

• Background

• Enhanced Communication

• Cost Control

• Inspection Requirement Frequency

Sewer Lateral Inspection Program (SLIP)
Sewer Lateral Information

• Sewer Laterals: ~300 miles (24,737)
• The sewer lateral connects the building’s sanitary plumbing to the City’s sewer main
• Homeowner is responsible for maintenance and repair including connection to sewer main (wye, tee or connection fitting)
• Privately-owned infrastructure
2018 SSO Events By Cause

- Total 7 Sewer System Overflows (SSOs)
- All 5 SSOs caused by roots from laterals
**Private Spills**

- Also known as Private Lateral Sewer Discharges (PLSDs)
- Reported to the State Water Resources Control Board
SLIP COMMERCIAL PROPERTIES

• 10 year re-inspection frequency
  • Required every 10 years regardless of condition

• Condominiums and Multi-Unit residential are included in “Commercial”
SLIP RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

• Permit Initiated
  - Addition of 400sf, or
  - Addition of two (2) or more new fixtures

• Defect observed during City main inspections

• Private Lateral Spill
**Sewer Lateral Inspection Program**

**Incentive Program**
- Reimburse up to $2,000 for property owners proactively repairing/replacing lateral

**Current Sewer Lateral Inspection Program**
- No longer offer incentive/rebate
- Commercial
  - Reestablished with the goal to inspect all commercial properties by 2023
- Residential
  - Currently no frequency requirement for inspection
  - Permit fees are waived if City requires inspection
Current Status of the SLIP Program

- 585, 54%: Under Review by Staff
- 253, 23%: SLIP 1 Issued - Video Request
- 123, 11%: SLIP 2 Issued - No Response/Warning
- 116, 11%: SLIP 3 Issued - Administrative Fine
- 11, 1%: SLIP 4 Issued - Work Needed
ENHANCED COMMUNICATION
Enhanced Communication

• Website
  - SLIP
  - Wastewater System
• Public Outreach Materials
  - Graphics
  - Notification Letters
  - Pamphlets
• Customer Support
WEBSITE UPDATES
Website Updates

• Wastewater System Website Updates
PUBLIC OUTREACH MATERIALS
Enhanced Public Outreach

Infographics

Informational Pamphlets

Improved Notification Letters

REVISED
Infographics – Lateral Ownership

- Depicts property owner’s responsibility (orange portion of pipes)
Infographics – Life Expectancy

- Easy to understand based on commonly replaced household items
Infographics – Repair/Rehab/Replace

- Show & explain difference in repair options as called out in repair letter
Informational Pamphlets - Inspection

SLIP: Santa Barbara Sewer Lateral Inspection Program

Santa Barbara’s Sewer Line Inspection Program (SLIP) protects our wastewater system – including the lines that serve your home – are in proper working condition all day, every day by ensuring our main sewer lines and your sewer lateral are in proper working condition. Below you will find information on the important responsibilities property owners have to maintain your sewer lateral and outlines resources available to help you understand and maintain these responsibilities.

SLIP helps ensure sewers are regularly inspected, maintained and repaired, protecting our community and environment by safely and effectively removing wastewater.

What is a Sewer Lateral?

A sewer lateral is the privately-owned pipe that connects a home or business to the City’s main sewer line. The sewer lateral carries wastewater away from your property to the City’s main sewer line, usually located in the street. Without proper maintenance, both private properties and the City’s infrastructure is at risk of costly and environmentally damaging impacts. Catching and fixing problems early – through inspection and repair – is always cheaper for you and the City than having to address problems after a sewer pipe breaks.

• Included with notification letters
• Describes ownership
• Explains SLIP process
Informational Pamphlets - Repair

- Explains Steps to Repair or Replace
- Explains Difference between
  - Repair
  - Rehabilitate
  - Replace
- Things to consider with your plumber

Connection Replacement (wye)

If your connection to the City’s main sewer line is defective, your letter will indicate that your connection should be replaced. In order to ensure the connection is installed correctly and, your plumbing contractor will work with the City to have the City’s Contractor replace your connection to the sewer mainline. As this is a service provided to you by the City, the connection replacement or “sewer tap” fee is never waived.

It is always a good practice to request quotes from multiple contractors. Once you select your plumbing contractor, they will need to obtain the required permits, undertake the repair and provide proof of repair to the City. For City-initiated residential repairs please visit www.santabarbaraca.gov/SLIP for additional information including:

1. Further description of the SLIP Process
2. Frequently Asked Questions
3. Cured In Place Pipe (CIPP) Lining Contractors performing work in the City of Santa Barbara
4. Extension Requests

Contact: Available hours: 7:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. M-Th and every other Friday.

Bradley Rahrer, Wastewater Collection System Superintendent  
Email: B.Rahrer@SantaBarbaraCA.gov (805)568-1080  
Dale Escobar, SLIP Coordinator  
Email: DEscobar@SantaBarbaraCA.gov (805)568-1032

Maribel Barrios, Administrative Specialist  
Email: M.Barrios@SantaBarbaraCA.gov (805)568-1086  
Thaddeus Vogel, Engineering Technician  
Email: TVogel@SantaBarbaraCA.gov (805)564-5368
Improved Notification Letters

- More collaborative
- Asking property owner for assistance
- Providing property owner support through the process
- Less authoritarian

As part of a recent, routine inspection of the public sewer main near your property, City staff from the Sewer Lateral Inspection Program (SLIP) discovered an issue with your sewer lateral located at <<SITE ADDRESS>>. A photograph of the issue is attached.

To clarify the problem and any additional defects or other potential blockages, we need your assistance. Please arrange for a qualified plumber who will need to use a camera to inspect, record and submit a video of the condition of your sewer lateral. Our staff is requesting that this video is submitted by <<DATE>> so the repair to your sewer lateral can be expedited. The video may be submitted to the Public Works front counter at 630 Garden Street or directly to SLIP staff at the El Estero Wastewater Treatment Plant at 520 E. Yanonali Street.
IMPROVED CUSTOMER SUPPORT
Improved Customer Support

Availability Sessions

Monthly Public Meetings

Site Visits with Property Owner
Availability Sessions

• 3rd Wednesday every month from 5:00 – 7:00pm
  - One-on-One explanation of process
  - Review inspection video
  - Discuss Repair vs. Rehabilitate/Replace

• By Appointment (during business hours)
Realtor Training

- Semi-annual presentations to realtors covering:
  - SLIP Process
  - Importance of lateral maintenance and repair
  - Inspection Standards
  - Repair Options
Site Visits with Property Owner

- Modelled after Water Conservation
- Individual Support
- Review inspection video
- Discuss Repair vs. Rehabilitate/Replace
COST CONTROL
Cost Controls

• Variability of lateral construction gives way to a wide range in repair methods and costs
• City Bid contracts would provide a baseline for costs
SLIP Process - Inspection

Inspection Letter Received
Property owner has 45 days to submit video

Property Owner Hires Certified Plumber
Plumber inspects lateral

Plumber submits lateral video to City
SLIP Coordinator review video for defects
Competitive Bid – Inspection & Cleaning

• Inspection & Cleaning Contract:
  - Customer uses City’s competitively selected plumbing contractor
  - City would coordinate to assist customer

• Offers cost control & simplicity to property owner
  - Compare bid prices to private quotes received
  - Take advantage of City Project Manager for coordination

• Staff is developing specifications
• Anticipate out to bid in June
### SLIP Process - Repair

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Repair Notification Letter Received</td>
<td>Property owner has 90 days to make repairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Property Owner Decides on Repair Solution</td>
<td>Repair? - Rehabilitate? - Replace? - Include wye?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plumber/contractor completes repair work</td>
<td>Proof of repairs submitted – Certificate of Compliance Issued</td>
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- **Rehabilitate** involves repairing the existing system to restore its functionality.
- **Replace** involves replacing the entire system.
- **Include wye?** refers to whether a wye is included in the repair solution.
Competitive Bids – Sewer Tap Option 1

- Status Quo – Sewer Tap Replacement
  - Customer selects a plumbing contractor
  - Plumbing Contractor obtains permit, excavates pit in Right of Way (ROW)
  - City Contractor performs wye replacement
  - Repairs rest of lateral (if applicable)
  - Plumbing contractor fills in pit and restores pavement
Competitive Bid – Sewer Tap Option 2

• New Option – Excavation & Sewer Tap Replacement:
  - Owner selects option; notifies City (pays fee)
  - Work would be coordinated by City and performed by the City Contractor
  - City staff locates lateral connection & schedules replacement
  - Contractor excavates pit, performs wye replacement, restores site

• Offers cost control & simplicity to property owner
  - Compare bid prices to private quotes received
• Any other lateral repair work done by owner-selected plumbing contractor
• Lateral can be repaired at a later date
Inspection Requirement Frequency

• What is appropriate frequency for sewer lateral inspection?
  - Commercial properties required every 10 years
  - Similar requirement for residential properties?
  - Time of sale?
  - Coordination with Capital Improvement?

• Staffing resources and program changes need to be finalized
  - Revisit in 2020
NEXT STEPS
Next Steps

• Receive feedback from Water Commission

• Return to Water Commission in summer 2019 with updates
  - Evaluation of staff workload
  - Financial assistance options
  - Stakeholder engagement
Discussion