

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Over the past few months, Rattlesnake Valley residents have asked some very good questions about the sanitary sewer system and creation of a Special Improvement District (SID). Please read on to answers to these questions...

Connection Fees, Sewer User Rates & SID Assessment Schedule

Q: What is an itemized list of the costs associated with installing sewer in my neighborhood and initially connecting my house to the sewer?

- A:**
- 1) SID Assessments – average assessment range from \$4,000 - \$6,000, with some much higher (assessments per address are available).
 - 2) SID Financing – financing will be at 3.75% interest over 20 years. Assessments can be paid in full after the first assessment is received. The first assessment will include some accrued interest.
 - 3) On-site connecting cost (from residence to sewer main, including excavation permit) – this cost is highly dependent on depth of service and distance to main and could range from \$2,500 to \$6,000. Also see [Connecting a House](#) below for more details.
 - 4) Connection fees - While the SID pays for the new pipe in front of your property, sewer connection fees pay for your portion of downstream systems, such as the Rattlesnake and Broadway sewer interceptor lines and the Wastewater Treatment Plant. This one-time fee is currently \$1,972 for a typical single-family home.

Q: How are the sewer main installation costs shared between the sewer utility and me?

- A:** Approximate Total Project Cost - \$4,013,000
SID Assessments - \$2,020,000
Grants - \$1,802,000
City Sewer Utility Fund - \$184,000

Q: What are the ongoing fees associated with sewer?

- A:** The current sewer user rate for a residence is approximately \$69.00 every 6 month billing period. More details are available on the [Sewer Rate Structure Page](#).

Q: Are there sewer maintenance fees even if I do not connect to the sewer?

- A:** Yes. Every property in the City that has sewer available pays a maintenance fee whether it is connected or not. Once the sewer mains are installed they must be maintained, and the wastewater treatment plant operating capacity must also be reserved for your property. Therefore, a maintenance fee is charged for the sewer main that is available to and will serve your property in the future.

Q: When will I have to start paying for the sewer maintenance fee?

- A:** Sewer billing begins when the property connects to the sewer main **OR** within one year of the sewer main becoming available to the property. These fees help pay the cost to maintain and clean each property's share of the main on a regular basis whether sewage is being flushed into the main or not, and assure each property's sewer main capacity remains available when needed.

Q: When will the first SID payment become due?

A: The SID will be assessed the first November after the project is substantially complete. The soonest billing date for the first payment on the SID is November 2010.

Q: When can I pay off the total SID if I want to avoid paying any interest rates?

A: An SID may be paid off at any time after the first assessment is made. Property owners must pay the first assessment along with any interest accrued and then may pay off the rest of the SID to avoid any further interest accruals.

Q: Are grants or financial assistance available for sewer connections?

A: Yes there are programs available to help with financing your sewer connection costs.

1. Bank Loan Program – you can borrow up to \$10,000 for no more than eight years. This loan is available through some of the local banks – the connecting property has to be residential.
2. [City Sewer Loan Program](#) (low income)– the connecting property has to be residential, owner-occupied, less than 50,000 square feet and the owner's income has to be meet the HUD Low Income guidelines (for instance a family of 4 can have an income of \$47,500).Contact City Public Works for further information.
3. The City anticipates a rebate of approximately \$300/household will be available through the Missoula Valley Water Quality District for each home that connects within the first two (2) years.

Connecting a House

Q: When can I connect my house to the public sewer?

A: After the sewer main line is built, tested and approved, owners may contract with local excavators to connect their homes. The testing and approval of the mains will occur as construction is completed on each block. Your neighborhood will be notified when the main is ready for connection.

Q: Will I be able to connect to the sewer main while the trench is open and the main line is being installed?

A: No. The contractor's bid is based upon a controlled excavation and backfill operation. As the mains are installed, the contractor will backfill immediately behind it. The main line must be backfilled so it can be tested with a soil load on it prior to connections.

Q: Are property owners able to work together to contract with a single excavator in order to reduce their costs?

A: Yes! The house or building connection is to be contracted by the homeowner. Multiple owners may be able to negotiate a contract price with a single excavator. **Important note:** Homeowners qualifying for grant assistance will need to arrange with the contractor for a separate contract document for each home included in the negotiated price.

Q: Is it possible to contract with any excavator to install the house service connection?

A: Only contractors that are licensed and bonded to work on City of Missoula sewer utility lines may perform sewer connection excavating and work. There are over 100 local contractors a homeowner may choose from to perform the work. For a list of licensed and bonded contractors, contact Jolene Ellerton at (406) 522-6349 or go to City Website for the list of [Licensed and Bonded Excavation Contractors](#).

Q: Am I able to negotiate what work my contractor will perform?

A: Yes, you may want to negotiate with your contractor for restoring the landscaping, fencing, etc. that may be disturbed by the excavation of your service line. The contractor is already required to install the pipe properly, assure the appropriate bedding and assure the abandonment of the old cesspool or septic tank.

Q: Will I need to remove my old septic tank or cesspool?

A: If the septic tank or cesspool is:

- a. Metal, the contractor drains and removes it.
- b. Concrete, the tank is simply abandoned.
- c. Rock Cesspool, top must be caved in and it is backfilled and abandoned.
- d. Other, must be investigated by your contractor.

Q: Can other utilities like telephone lines be buried at the time of completing the sewer connection?

A: It is possible, but this must be coordinated with the City and the independent utility providers.

Sewer Alternatives

Q: The City is proposing a gravity flow sewer system. Has the City looked at other options to the gravity sewer collection system?

A: The City has researched several viable alternatives to conventional gravity sewers. We evaluated Septic Tank Effluent Pump (STEP) systems, vacuum systems, on-site treatment and small diameter variable grade gravity sewers. The conventional gravity sewer is the most economical and maintainable system. For more information on alternative analysis, please review the [Environmental Assessment](#).

Q: What about on-site treatment of septic waste? I have heard about a sawdust system that only costs \$2,500?

A: The \$2,500 only pays for the special sawdust chamber, but does not include installation or the other parts necessary to operate the system. On-site treatment systems require pump chambers, electrical control systems, water-tight septic tanks, and enough room for a drain field. The cost of installation is estimated to exceed \$12,000 per property, and most unsewered properties in the Rattlesnake do not have enough room for a drain field. On-site systems require periodic maintenance of the mechanical parts and pumping of septic tanks. All property owners would need to pay maintenance fees and grant access easements on their property for long term operation of the on-site systems. On-site septic waste treatment systems are not a viable alternative for the Rattlesnake Valley.

Sanitary Sewer

Q: Will the gravity sewer mains be deep enough to serve basements?

A: The sewer mains are designed to serve most properties with basements. However, there will be some properties on downhill lots where the grade does not allow for gravity connections. Those properties will need a private pump for their service line connection. Some properties may be able to obtain an easement from neighboring properties to allow for gravity service line connections.

Q: When the sewer main is constructed most properties will have a service line stub installed from the main to the property line. Can I choose the location of my service line?

A: Yes. Service lines are stubbed out of the street to allow for repaving. Each property owner will be contacted so they can choose the location of their service line.

Q: Why doesn't the City contractor install the house connections? Wouldn't it be less expensive for the homeowner?

- A:** There are several reasons why the City's contractor may not be able to install the private service connections:
- a. All cities are restricted to financing only the public portion of facilities like the sewer main lines. The private house sewer service is owned by the property owner and cannot be financed with public monies.
 - b. The City is required to pay State and Federal wage rates to its contractors. These wage rates would be costly for the private homeowner to pay.
 - c. The City's contractor uses very large excavation equipment that is unsuitable for working in homeowners' backyards.
 - d. The City's contractor would require a design of the on-site connection. The engineering design fee would be an added cost to the homeowner.
 - e. There are over 100 local contractors who are bonded and licensed to install private sewer services. These local contractors are able to negotiate their costs and have smaller equipment available more suitable to backyard work.

Development Density

Q: Will public sewer extensions cause an increase in dense development and “in fill” on existing lots along Skyline Drive, Parkside Drive, Village Place, Highland Drive or the west side of Duncan Drive adjoining any of these properties?

A: No. There are only a few undeveloped lots and based on lot size sewer availability should not have any bearing on the current density they can be developed to. Additionally, approximately 97% of properties in the project area are already developed, so any SID will primarily enable the existing housing to connect to public sewer. Public sewer mains are **currently** available with reasonable extensions to most vacant properties in the Rattlesnake Valley.

Federal & State Environmental Compliance

Q: Has the City complied with required State and Federal environmental reviews (NEPA and MEPA) for the City's wastewater system?

A: Yes. Both the 1984 and 2000 City Wastewater Facility Plans had approved environmental reviews in accordance with Federal and State regulations. Both Plans were approved by State and Environmental Protection Agency officials. Both Plans included the Rattlesnake Valley in the Sewer Facility Service Area.

Q: Has the City fully complied with all State and Federal required environmental reviews related to the Rattlesnake Sewer Project?

A: Yes. The City has completed an [Environmental Assessment](#) of community wastewater operations as required by EPA and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality. State and Federal environmental review approval documents are available at the City.

Q: I understand that an earlier proposal for sewer in the Rattlesnake has been in litigation for several years. How does this affect the current sewer SID proposal?

A: All lawsuits associated with the project have been dismissed.

Wastewater Treatment Capacity

Q: Does the wastewater treatment plant have capacity for this project?

A: Yes. The wastewater treatment plant currently has the capacity to process 12.0 million gallons of sewage every day. The plant is currently treating 9.0 million gallons per day, or only 75% of its available capacity.