

Council to move ahead with costly sewer repairs

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
Thursday, 25 April 2013 14:27 -

Public gets chance to comment on \$2.2 million proposal

Aging sewers, and problems caused through cracks and groundwater infiltration, has plagued the city for years.

After torrential rain flooded sewers and streets, causing sewers to back up in June of 2010, citizens with damaged basements complained to the Gothenburg City Council.

That same year, the city engineer offered costly sewer improvement proposals but no action was taken.

Fast forward to 2013 and the council is ready to move.

During the council's April 9 meeting, members decided to have a public hearing, possibly in May, when the community will have a chance to comment on proposed repairs totalling \$2.2 million and how to finance such a project.

Reed Miller, president of Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers of Kearney, recommended four areas throughout town that most need repairs.

Estimates include:

Area I: Fourth Street between Highway 47 and the tailrace—\$371,800. Because of groundwater infiltration, this project has the highest priority. The majority of the work would be sewer replacement.

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Area II: Fourth Street between Highway 47 and Cottonwood Drive—\$51,800. The price is less than the first project because a liner, instead of sewer replacement, can be used.

Area III: On Cottonwood Drive along the city's wastewater treatment plant—\$69,500. Installation of a liner is proposed.

Area IV: From the wastewater treatment plant and across Highway 30 (including a third highway crossing) to 11th Street—\$1,078,300 to \$1,740,300 to replace existing sewer. The high cost is because of pavement removal and replacement costs.

If all the projects were completed as one, Miller estimated a \$1,572,400 to \$2,233,400 price tag, depending on the scope of work the council decides to do in Area IV.

He noted that \$100,000 in revolving loan funds through the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality may be available or low-interest bonds.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said the bond market may be less expensive than getting a loan and paying potentially higher interest rates.

Raising user fees to pay for improvements is also an option. However Clymer said there may be a way to avoid a fee hike, at least initially.

Clymer said the wastewater treatment plant was paid off in December, noting that the city has increased debt payments on Gothenburg Improvement Company Third Addition infrastructure and an ultraviolet project at the wastewater treatment plant. Payoff is scheduled for 2016, he said.

“The same idea is applied in regard to potential new projects,” Clymer said in reference to sewer improvements. “We would probably only pay interest the first couple of years to keep payments low and in 2016 start paying off the principal.”

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Council president Jeff Kennedy said the council has talked about sewer repairs for years and keeps putting them off.

Kennedy said he didn't want to see the costs become so high that the community can't operate.

Eliminating groundwater infiltration through repairs could help the city attract a large industry, he noted.

City attorney Mike Bacon, who is also Gothenburg Improvement Company president, said limited sewer capacity has affected the city's business recruitment.

Bacon also wondered whether or not to try to complete all of the repairs since rates won't get any lower.

Miller suggested the projects be bid in January or February 2014 since contractors are lining up spring and summer projects now.

In other business, the council:

entered into an agreement with the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission to rehabilitate Lake Helen. The NGPC has agreed to give \$500,000 of Aquatic Habitat Program Funds to reconstruct the lake.

approved an agreement that transfers paving assessments from Jerry Schnacker to Kirt Knoedler who bought Schnacker Automotive at 401 Fifth St.

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authorized Mayor Joyce Hudson to sign a resolution and agreement with the Nebraska Department of Roads for improvements to Highway 47 north of 27th Street.

kept open a public hearing to discuss the possibility of the Patrick Lafleur children of having a snow cone stand this summer in front of their home at 1721 Ave. D. The matter will be discussed at a later meeting.

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