

City mulls sewer repair options

Written by Elizabeth Barrett
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MILLER

Federal, state funding possible

Perusing cost estimates and prioritizing sewer projects took up the lion's share of the Gothenburg City Council meeting on June 5.

City officials want to avoid raising customer rates to pay for needed repairs but also want to do what is necessary to fix aging sewers, especially lines with a lot of groundwater infiltration.

By televising areas of the city with the most problems, Miller and Associates Consulting Engineers of Kearney came up with a plan for \$4.7 million of improvements.

The council wants to tackle south-side projects first, where infiltration of groundwater is the worst.

Reed Miller, president of Miller and Associates, said south-side projects should be a priority.

"Those lines are in the deepest water," Miller said, noting that repair expenses would be less there than on the north side where more pavement must be removed and replaced.

Miller described one particularly bad spot on Fourth Street west of Lake Avenue. When a sewer jet blew sand from a line, he said he'd never seen a pipe re-fill so fast with sand.

Discussion also centered around the installation of a relief line that would connect to a 15-inch

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main at Highway 30 and Cottonwood Drive. The line takes sewage to the wastewater treatment plant.

Reed said the new line would help keep the main line from running as full as it is now.

Repairing lines could force the water table to rise but city officials pointed out that many homes on the south side don't have basements.

The estimated price tag for south-side projects would be \$2.8 million.

As far as help in funding the projects, Miller said a Department of Environmental Quality revolving loan fund is a possibility, as well as a United States Department of Agriculture grant.

One requirement of the USDA grant, he noted, is that sewer rates are what customers should pay, based on a national average that Miller thought was about \$38 a month.

City rates are now \$30.20 for residents and \$39.35 for commercial businesses.

City administrator Bruce Clymer said the city might be able to afford improvements by carrying debt for the next 18 years. Money borrowed to build the wastewater treatment plant was paid off recently, he said

Clymer said payments have been re-directed toward principal on the Gothenburg Improvement Company's Third Addition which will be paid for in 2016.

Clymer suggested that the council prioritize projects and how the city could pay for them with help from loans.

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“We can then make a decision whether or not to proceed and apply for funds,” he said.

Council members will revisit the issue at the June 19 meeting.

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