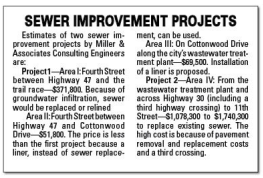


SEWER IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS

Estimates of two sewer improvement projects by Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers are:

Project1—Area I: Fourth Street between Highway 47 and the trail race—$371,800. Because of groundwater infiltration, sewer would be replaced or relined

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.

Project 2—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 and a third crossing.

Rate increase proposed to pay for projects

City sewer rates would rise about 60 cents per household under a Gothenburg City Council proposal to fix aging sewers.

Council members have struggled with how to repair sewers in recent years, a problem that came to a head in June of 2010 when torrential rains flooded sewers and basements.

At a June 4 meeting of the council, city administrator Bruce Clymer presented historical and projected debt for the city sewer department.

Documents showed different debt scenarios, using the proposed sewer projects, and how soon existing debt could be paid off without doing the proposed $2.2 million in repairs.

Clymer also told how debt could be eliminated in 20 years through a Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality low-interest loan and by raising city sewer rates.

Following a 40-minute public hearing about the sewer improvement projects, at which no one from the public spoke, the council decided to apply for funds through the NDEQ to help with repairs.

Action to raise sewer rates would be taken at a future meeting.

During the hearing, council members voiced their support for the project that could likely receive a $100,000 loan at 2% interest to be repaid over 20 years.

Council member Jeff Whiting said the city has tried to keep sewers from backing up in some homes following big rains without much success.

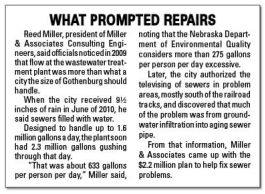
“They feel the problem is probably worse and if the town is going to grow, I don’t see why we can’t move forward,” Whiting said.

Tim Strauser, another council member, agreed.

City attorney Mike Bacon, speaking on behalf of the Gothenburg Improvement Company, said if the town isn’t allowed to grow, it will shrink and problems with new housing in the northeast part of town will be exacerbated as sewage is forced through two narrow passages.

Bacon also pointed to a new industrial park the GIC is trying to grow in the southeast part of Gothenburg that, under the current sewer system and wastewater treatment plant, is under capacity.

“We need to solve groundwater problems and prepare for the future,” he said.



WHAT PROMPTED REPAIRS

Reed Miller, president of Miller & Associates Consulting Engineers, said officials noticed in 2009 that flow at the wastewater treatment plant was more than what a city the size of Gothenburg should handle.

When the city received 9½ inches of rain in June of 2010, he said sewers filled with water.

Designed to handle up to 1.6 million gallons a day, the plant soon had 2.3 million gallons gushing through that day.

“That was about 633 gallons per person per day,” Miller said, noting that the Nebraska Department of Environmental Quality considers more than 275 gallons per person per day excessive.

Later, the city authorized the televising of sewers in problem areas, mostly south of the railroad tracks, and discovered that much of the problem was from groundwater infiltration into aging sewer pipe.

From that information, Miller & Associates came up with the $2.2 million plan to help fix sewer problems.

Bacon added that the city is still in litigation with homeowners affected by sewage during a four-day rain event in 2010 when 9 inches of rain poured on the city.

In August of 2011, eight homeowners submitted claims totalling $261,548 for damage caused

by sewage in their homes.

Council member Duane Oliver said he didn't think anything could have been done to prevent sewage problems during the 2010 downpour and agreed with Bacon about the need for increased sewer capacity with the addition of more homes.

Oliver added that reduction of groundwater infiltration by lining or replacing sewers would help.

Miller suggested that the city bid the project in February of 2014 with work to start in the spring if bids are favorable.

Clymer said design and other costs will increase if the council doesn't do anything and if bids are too high, project two (see box) can be delayed.

On another matter, the council discussed a request to close a portion of 12th Street, between Avenue I and Avenue J, for a day-long Christian outreach concert with bands on June 22.

Russell Tripp asked for closure of the street so musicians could easily set up and take down their stage just north of the closed street.

However because of safety concerns on 12th Street, council members denied the request.

In other business, the council:

granted Bill Auld a license to maintain a power line under 21st Street, across from the Wellness Center. Auld's electrical meter would be across the street.

passed an inter-local agreement to add a 60-killowatt generator to the Senior Center for use during an emergency.

The Senior Center is a designated shelter that feeds and houses people during an emergency. Senior Center personnel will maintain the generator that the city bought from federal surplus.

approved a professional services agreement between the city and West Central Nebraska Development District that allows WCNDD officials to administer a Community Development Block Grant that provides owner-occupied rehabilitation housing in Gothenburg.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com

308-537-3636