

Headlines



Rock Island Invests in the Future of the Sewer and Water Systems

March 24, 2006

The City of Rock Island began operating the sewer utility in 1850 and the water utility was added in 1871. The City Council recently took major steps to ensure this tradition of high quality water and sewer service will continue.

Sewer System

Most Rock Island neighborhoods between the Mississippi and Rock Rivers are served by a combined sewer system, which means that stormwater and sewage are carried in the same pipelines. Under normal conditions, all combined sewage receives full treatment at the Mill Street Sewage Treatment Plant before being discharged into the Mississippi River. However, during some rainstorms, the system is overloaded and a small portion of the combined sewage is discharged into the rivers without treatment. According to current federal regulations, the sewer system must be improved so there are fewer untreated combined sewer overflows.



The city staff and a citizens advisory group developed a plan, Combined Sewer Long Term Control Plan (LTCP), for bringing the system into compliance. If the LTCP is approved by the US Environmental Protection Agency, Rock Island will invest almost \$67,000,000 in the sewer system during the next 12 years. The construction program has five major components.

1) Mill Street Sewage Treatment Plant Enlargement

The existing plant can treat about 16 million gallons of combined sewage per day. This treatment capacity will be increased to 230 million gallons per day in order to bring the treatment plant into federal compliance and dramatically reduce the number of untreated combined sewer overflows each year.

2) Interceptor Sewer Construction

The downtown sewer system cannot carry all the combined sewage generated during large rainstorms. When the system is overloaded, a small portion of the combined sewage is diverted into the Sylvan Slough. This capacity deficiency will be resolved by the construction of two large diameter interceptor sewers.

3) Blackhawk Creek Combined Sewer Overflow

The combined sewer system overflows approximately once per year into Blackhawk Creek slightly upstream from the Blackhawk Historic Site. This overflow point will be relocated to a point west of the Historic Site.

4) Sewer Separation

New storm sewers will be constructed in a neighborhood bounded by 24th Street, 30th Street, 5th Avenue and 9th Avenue and the existing combined sewer system serving the neighborhood will be converted to a sanitary sewer.

5) Combined Sewer Storage

An underground tank will be constructed in the vicinity of the old "Farmall" viaduct to temporarily store 1,700,000 million gallons of combined sewage during heavy rainstorms. After flow in the combined sewer system subsides, the contents of the tank will be pumped back into the combined sewer system and it is treated at the Mill Street Sewage Treatment Plant.

A large portion (\$44,000,000) of the cost of these improvements will be paid through the sale of bonds. A series of sewer rate increases is needed to pay the remainder of the construction costs, the debt service for the bonds and the operation/maintenance costs for the expanded sewer facilities. The first two rate increases, 10% in 2006 and 15% in 2007, have been approved by the City Council and others will be needed in future years. The city is aggressively searching for state and federal grants to pay a portion of the sewer system improvement costs and the size of future sewer rate increases will depend upon the success of this search.

Water System

The Water Utility Evaluation completed in 2005 recommended *"Rock Island needs to follow the example of our predecessors and insure that customers have a first-rate water system in 2050 and beyond. This requires an enhancement of distribution maintenance efforts and a systematic watermain replacement program."* The evaluation identified four long-term goals for the water system.

1. **Production Quality** - The City will produce water that surpasses state and federal drinking water quality standards.
2. **Production Quantity** - The City will produce enough water to satisfy all customer and fire protection needs.
3. **Water Distribution Quantity and Reliability** - The City will dependably delivery drinking water to customers at pressures and volumes that allow all customers to utilize their normal plumbing fixtures.

4. **Fire Protection** - The City will deliver enough water to all neighborhoods to satisfy the capacities of modern fire suppression equipment.

The water treatment plant was upgraded in 1999 and the water production goals are being satisfied. Unfortunately the water distribution and fire protection goals are not being met in some neighborhoods. The water distribution system containing 223 miles of watermains is deteriorating with age and almost one-half of the watermains are undersized.

In order to meet the water distribution and fire protection goals, the city is increasing routine water distribution system maintenance and implementing a systematic Watermain Replacement Program. The Watermain Replacement Program will begin in 2006 and grow each year until one percent (2.2 miles) of the water distribution system is being replaced each year. It will take approximately 50 years to replace all of the undersized watermains in Rock Island.

A series of water rate increases will finance the costs of the enhanced water distribution system maintenance and the Watermain Replacement Program. The first two rate increases, 14% in 2006 and 10% in 2007, have been approved by the City Council and others will be needed in future years.

The Rock Island [Public Works Department](#) prepared a "road show" that outlines the needs of the sewer and sewer utilities and the recommended system improvements. Public Works Director Bob Hawes and [City Manager](#) John Phillips have presented the information to over twenty-five neighborhood organizations, businesses and civic groups in the past few months. Contact the Public Works Director at 732-2200 or pubworksmail@rigov.org if you would like a presentation to your organization or if you have questions about this information.