



City of Homer

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Memorandum 20-166

TO: City Council
THROUGH: Rob Dumouchel, City Manager
FROM: Janette Keiser, Director of Public Works
DATE: October 7, 2020
SUBJECT: Linking water service permits to connections to City sewers

Issue: Currently, there is no requirement that people requesting connection to the City's water system be connected to the City's sewer system, thereby creating the potential for public health hazards. The purpose of this memorandum is to propose that this be corrected.

Background:

In 2019, the Homer City Council reviewed the City code provisions relating to the City's public utility provisions. The purpose was to "*ensure they were up to date, clear and consistent*". This resulted in substantial changes to Title 14, Homer Public Water System, and Title 17, Improvement Districts. The purpose of the changes proposed in this Memorandum is to take the 2019 Council's efforts a step further. Specifically, the proposed changes would make a connection between (1) having access to City sewer access and (2) getting access to City water.

Numerous properties in the City are not served by City sewer, but rely on on-site sewage disposal systems. These systems must be permitted by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation when they are installed. At one time, this agency conducted regular inspections of such systems. However, due to budget cutbacks, this is no longer the case. On-site septic systems are challenging in Homer because of bad soils, high ground water and copious quantities of surface water from rainfall, open springs and storm water runoff.

Installing a properly operating septic system in such conditions is expensive. Prices for septic tank/leachfield systems in Homer range between \$20-\$30,000. Further, they are expensive to maintain and replace. We know at least one property owner in the Tasmania Court neighborhood replaced their septic leachfield in the past year, at the cost of about \$11,000. The combined assessment for both water and sewer mains in the Tasmania Court neighborhood is currently projected to be \$20,967.

People want City water because it offers higher quality, ever-present reliability and lower cost than hauled water. We get multiple requests for water special improvement districts, to extend water lines to new customers, every year. This comes with a price – it can trigger public health risks. People

connected to City water usually use more water than those who rely on hauled water; typical household water use for municipal water is 150 gallons per person per day, instead of 25 or fewer gallons per day for households using hauled water. It is reasonable to expect that access to City water will exacerbate the challenges related to septic systems in neighborhoods with poor soils and high ground water. It is in the best interests of the public health and welfare to require people who want access to City water to connect to City sewers.

This would mean that people requesting a water special assessment district would also need to be part of a sewer special assessment district. This need not be a substantial financial hardship. First, the City is usually able to offer long term, low-interest financing on such assessment districts. Second, current code gives property owners three years to connect, once city utilities become available in their neighborhood. By that time, homeowners may be more than happy to connect to a problem-free sewer main!

We propose to edit the Homer City Code as follows:

14.08.040 Water connection and extension permit.

- a. All property owners connecting to the water system must obtain a permit prior to starting construction.
- b. The water system connection and extension permit application shall be available at the City Clerk's office, the Public Works Department, and/or on the City's website. The permit fee must be paid at the time the application is submitted. The criteria for the permit shall be included in the application.
- c. The Public Works Director or his or her designee may revoke, modify or impose conditions upon a water system permit if he or she finds, in his or her sole discretion, that revocation, conditions or modifications to the permit are required to prevent or stop damage to the water system or protect public health or sanitation. *Except when immediate action is necessary to protect the water system and prevent immediate harm to public health and sanitation, the Public Works Director shall provide notice to the property owner at least 30 days before revoking or modifying a water system permit.*
- d. Installation of a water system connection or extension of a water main must meet the standards and specifications in the permit application, the Homer City Code, and any applicable State or Federal law or regulations, including but not limited to State of Alaska Department of Labor Occupational Safety and Health requirements. **Except as otherwise provided for in the Homer City Code, permits for connections to the water system or an extension of a water main to properties that are not served with City sewer service, will not be issued.**
- e. A property owner installing an on-site water connection line or extending a water main is solely responsible for all costs and liability associated with or arising from the excavation, connection, and installation of the on-site water line or water main extension. [Ord. 19-23(S-2)(A) § 4, 2019].

17.02.170 Water and sewer connections required.

- (a) Except as otherwise provided in the code, the owner of property in a water or sewer special assessment district that contains an occupied building shall connect to the improvement constructed in the district within three years after the date that the resolution confirming the assessment roll for the district becomes final. [Ord. 19-23(S-2)(A) § 5, 2019].

(b) Property owners and developers interested in initiating water special assessment districts should review the provisions of Homer City Code Section 14.08.040, which provides that “[e]xcept as otherwise provided in the Homer City Code, permits for connections to the water system or an extension of a water main to properties that are not served with City sewer service, will not be issued”. Thus, Special Assessment Districts for water main extensions will only be formed (1) where city sewer is available or (2) if a Special Assessment District for a sewer main extension is also formed.

Recommendations:

That the City Council adopt the proposed edits to HCC 14.08.040 and 17.02.170.