



City Council

Revisions to the Septic Tank Effluent Pumping (S.T.E.P.) System Regulations - Deliberations

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Title

Revisions to the Septic Tank Effluent Pumping (S.T.E.P.) System Regulations - Deliberations

Recommended Action

Move to recommend City Council approve proposed revisions.

Report

Issue:

Whether to recommend City Council approve proposed revisions to the Septic Tank Effluent Pumping (S.T.E.P.) System Regulations.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Diane Utter, P.E., Water Resources Engineer, 360.753.8562

Background and Analysis:

Septic Tank Effluent Pumping (S.T.E.P.) systems are sewer services that utilize individual tanks and pumps at residences and commercial sites. Wastewater liquid is pumped directly into the sewage collection system. The tank collects solids, which are then pumped periodically, usually every seven years. The City is responsible for the maintenance and pumping of the vast majority of S.T.E.P. systems within the city limits and urban growth area.

The 2007 Wastewater Management Plan significantly restricted the use of S.T.E.P. systems. Restrictions on S.T.E.P. systems were based on additional maintenance costs per service connection and odor and corrosion problems associated with elevated hydrogen sulfide concentrations. Current City regulations permit the use of S.T.E.P. systems only to serve existing lots adjacent to existing S.T.E.P. mains. This has left a number of otherwise subdividable properties and small investors stranded without sewer service for the foreseeable future.

The 2013 Wastewater Management Plan proposed allowing new S.T.E.P. systems for infill. This was a strategy under "*Objective ID: Facilitate the orderly expansion of the public sewer system.*" This objective is in support of the goal stating "*Clean Water Act and Safe Drinking Water Act standards*

are met.”

The proposed changes are supported by two 2014 Comprehensive Plan goals:

- Goal GL16 *“The range of housing types and densities are consistent with the community’s changing population needs and preferences”* and specifically Policy PL16.1 *“Support increasing housing densities through the well-designed, efficient, and cost-effective use of buildable land, consistent with environmental constraints and affordability. Use both incentives and regulations, such as minimum and maximum density limits, to achieve such efficient use.”*
- Goal GL11 *“Adequate commercial land conveniently serves local and regional trade areas”* and specifically Policy PL11.3 *“Work with developers to identify commercial areas for infill and redevelopment, to remove unnecessary barriers to this type of development, and to provide the infrastructure needed for intensive commercial and mixed use development.”*

The proposed changes are summarized below:

- Clarifying that S.T.E.P sewer connections are not permitted where a gravity sewer is available to the property.
- Allowing S.T.E.P. connections for properties created through a short plat after the date of adoption of the revisions.
- Stating that only one short plat shall be allowed per property in existence at the time of adoption of the revisions.
- Allowing connection to S.T.E.P. force mains extended as part of the Septic to Sewer program.

Specifically, staff proposes to allow one short plat (up to nine lots) on an existing property located adjacent to an existing S.T.E.P. main. Short plats would allow infill on small properties. Larger properties could move forward with limited development under the proposed scenario but would eventually be required to construct a regional sewer pump station and subdivide through the long plat process. Properties that short plat are required to demonstrate they can ultimately attain at least the minimum density specified for the zoning district.

The proposed revision would allow additional infill to help achieve growth management densities. An evaluation of the sewer infrastructure and existing properties determined that if every lot greater than one half acre were to subdivide, 450 additional lots could be eligible for S.T.E.P. sewer service. It is assumed that approximately half of that number of lots would actually be created. We have consulted with City Operations staff who stated that the additional S.T.E.P. systems associated with the proposal are manageable.

To allow small infill development where conventional sewer service is not in the foreseeable future, staff recommends the above changes to restrictions on S.T.E.P. sewer services.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The proposed revisions are consistent with encouraging vibrant urban, neighborhoods. Currently, there are a number of undeveloped properties that will likely remain undeveloped if the regulations are not revised.

Options:

Option 1: After holding a public hearing, recommend City Council approve proposed revisions.

Option 2: Return to the Commission for additional consideration and revisions prior to forwarding recommendations to Council.

Option 3: Recommend City Council not approve proposed revisions.

Financial Impact:

Property owners would finance S.T.E.P. sewer extensions and installations. The wastewater utility would not have significant up-front costs.

The revision would result in additional maintenance costs to the wastewater utility due to the increased number of S.T.E.P. systems. The exact cost will depend on the number of additional systems. City Operations staff can maintain additional S.T.E.P. systems without a significant increase in resources. Staff would continue to monitor the number and determine if additional financial resources are needed in the future.

The financial impact to property owners would be positive; development would occur in areas where it has not been financially feasible.

Attachments:

Draft Ordinance

UAC Letter