



CITY OF NOVI CITY COUNCIL

AUGUST 11, 2025

SUBJECT: Consideration of two Resolutions authorizing the conversion of Existing County Drain Facilities in Novi to a new Drain district; the Rouge Valley Sanitary Inter-County Drain

SUBMITTING DEPARTMENT: Department of Public Works, Engineering Division

KEY HIGHLIGHTS:

- Current arrangement between the City and the County involves a system known as the Huron Rouge Sanitary Disposal System (HRSDS), owned and operated by the County under Act 342.
- County Water Resource Commissioner (WRC) has asked to convert the system to two separate systems to be owned and operated instead under the state Drain Code.
- The Resolutions before Council authorize the City to file Petitions with the WRC for the creation of the two Drains.
- WRC believes that the conversion benefits both the City and WRC; City Administration does not object to the conversion.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Sanitary sewage from the homes and businesses in the City of Novi collected by the City into City-owned and -maintained system is ultimately discharged into sanitary sewage facilities that are owned by Oakland County's Huron-Rouge Sewage Disposal System (HRSDS). The HRSDS then discharges to the Rouge Valley Sewage Disposal System (RVSDS), which is owned, operated, and maintained by Wayne County. The City pays Oakland County, and Oakland County in turn pays Wayne County, for the right to make that discharge.

The largest portion of Oakland County's HRSDS drain is in the City of Novi (serving essentially 2/3 of the system); however, the County does own and maintain a portion of the sanitary sewer system in Wayne County in the City of Northville.

Oakland County provides this sewage disposal service under what is known as “Act 342” authority, and it basically amounts to an agreement between the City and Oakland County. In practice, the County monitors and maintains its sanitary sewer facilities on behalf of the City and makes appropriate improvements when necessary, and then charges the City for those improvements. The City pays Oakland County “rates,” just like property owners in the City pay the City rates/user fees based upon how much sewage is discharged in the City’s system.

WRC has requested the City to consider changing the legal basis for this arrangement between Oakland County and Novi—though not necessarily to change anything about how the arrangement works on a day-to-day basis. More specifically, WRC has asked the City to agree to convert the current Act 342 system to what are known as a “Chapter 20” drain and a “Chapter 21” drain (these terms are references to chapters in the State Drain Code). The Chapter 20 drain designation would apply to all facilities within the City of Novi and Oakland County; the Chapter 21 designation would apply to the portion of the drain in Wayne County/City of Northville. Essentially, a Chapter 20 drain is intra-county, while a Chapter 21 drain is an inter-county arrangement.

As part of this process, City administration asked the County to put together an explanation as to why the Chapter 20/Chapter 21 drain would be better than the Act 342 system. Attached is a document prepared by WRC listing points in that regard. As a general proposition, however, the biggest difference is that a Chapter 20/Chapter 21 drain is essentially governed by a public body—a “Drainage Board” comprised of elected officials—whereas under the current system, administration at the WRC level (i.e., County administrative officials) make most of the decisions regarding the drain. If the current drain system were converted to a Chapter 20/Chapter 21 system, there would be regularly scheduled open meetings and formal approvals of actions by the Drain Board in connection with improvements.

Also attached are copies of the Petitions WRC would like the City to authorize to commence the conversion process to the Chapter 20/21 Drains, as well as Resolutions that the County has prepared for the City to authorize the filing of the Petitions, with visual depictions of the areas affected.

City staff are amenable to the conversions as WRC already operates Chapter 20/21 drains within Novi for regional storm water management. WRC officials are present to address questions as needed.

RECOMMENDED ACTION: Approve two Resolutions authorizing the filing of Petitions necessary to convert existing County Drain facilities in Novi, now known as the Huron Rouge Sewage Disposal System, into a Chapter 20 Drain to be identified as the Huron Rouge Sanitary Drain and a Chapter 21 Drain to be identified as the Rouge Valley Sanitary Inter-County Drain