



City of Stevenson

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MEMORANDUM

From: Jenny Taylor, Mayor

To: City Council

RE: Policy Feedback on Revised Sewer Ordinance

Date: May 21, 2026

After reviewing the revised sewer ordinance and the feedback received so far, I wanted to summarize the main policy issues that may need additional clarification before adoption. Overall, I think the draft is moving in the right direction. It appears to recognize one of Council's main concerns: existing properties with functioning, approved on-site septic systems should not be automatically required to connect to sewer simply because sewer is available.

1. Make optional connection clear for existing approved septic systems

The ordinance should clearly state that existing properties with currently working, approved septic systems are not required to connect unless another trigger applies. Possible triggers could include septic failure, expansion of use, added capacity, redevelopment, or a public health concern. Right now, the connection table can still read as though existing development must connect when sewer is available. Even if the exception language says otherwise, this could create confusion.

Recommended direction: Put the protection for existing functioning septic systems directly into the table, not only in the exceptions section.

2. Clarify the treatment of the 26 households and beyond

Council previously discussed the approximately 26 households facing an immediate connection issue. How should we handle future connections beyond the initial 26?

My understanding is that the intent was not to force those households to connect if they have functioning approved septic systems. Instead, the intent was to give them a defined period of

time to decide whether they wanted to connect. If they choose to connect during that window, the City would waive the system development charge. If they choose not to connect and later decide to connect, they would pay the full SDC.

That should be framed as an incentive window, not a mandatory connection deadline.

Recommended direction: Clarify that these households may choose to connect and receive the SDC waiver, but are not required to connect solely because sewer is available if they have a functioning approved septic system.

3. Decide whether the SDC waiver window should be one year or two years

There is a policy question about whether the SDC waiver window should be one year or two years. A one-year window may make sense if it is tied to the timeline for a sewer extension project. However, two years may be more practical for property owners who need time to understand the ordinance, get bids, line up contractors, and make financial decisions.

Recommended direction: Council should decide whether the waiver is intended to be a short project-based incentive or a broader voluntary connection incentive.

4. Clarify when sewer connection fees apply

If existing functioning septic systems are allowed to remain in service, we should make sure sewer connection fees only apply when a property actually connects or is required to connect. If a property is not required to connect at the time of sale or transfer, it may be confusing to have sewer-related fees triggered by the sale of the property.

Recommended direction: Ask the attorney to clarify that sewer connection fees apply when a property connects to sewer or when connection is required, not simply because a property is sold.

5. Limit penalties and liens to true mandatory connection situations

The revised ordinance still includes penalty, billing, lien, and collection language. That may be appropriate where connection is actually required, but it should not apply to property owners who are allowed to remain on functioning approved septic systems. Based on our prior meeting and conversations, penalties were not part of the policy direction we discussed, which reinforces the need to make this section very clear.

Recommended direction: Clarify that penalties, liens, and collection tools only apply after a clear connection requirement has been triggered, proper notice has been provided, and appeal rights have been addressed.

6. Add periodic septic inspection requirements

If the City allows existing approved septic systems to remain in use, we should consider requiring periodic inspections to confirm those systems are still functioning properly. This creates a reasonable balance: the City would not force connection for functioning approved systems, but property owners would need to show that their systems remain compliant and are not creating public health, groundwater, or water quality concerns.

Recommended direction: Consider requiring septic inspection documentation every three to five years, coordinated with county and state health requirements.

7. Clarify who handles appeals

The draft currently gives Council a role in appeals. Council should decide whether that is the preferred process. Council may want to retain authority over hardship or policy-based exceptions, but more technical or administrative decisions may be better handled by staff or another review process.

Recommended direction: Ask the attorney to clarify options for appeal authority.

8. Clarify outside-city connections

The draft includes language about outside-city connections. Council should clarify whether the City intends to allow outside-city sewer or water connections and, if so, under what conditions. If the City does allow service outside city limits, it should be discretionary and subject to clear City-approved terms, including capacity, cost recovery, infrastructure impacts, and long-term planning considerations.

Recommended direction: Clarify that outside-city sewer or water connections are not automatic and require City approval.

Guiding Policy Objective

My goal is to make sure the ordinance is clear, practical, and aligned with Council's intent: protect the sewer system, recognize functioning septic systems, encourage voluntary connection where appropriate, avoid unnecessary penalties, and provide residents with a path forward that is easy to understand.