



City of Stevenson

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MEMORANDUM

To: City Council Members: Tina Van Pelt, Erin Minnis, Jeff Breckel and Dave Cox

Cc: Robert Muth, City Attorney

From: Jenny Taylor, Mayor

Date: April 14, 2026

Subject: Sewer Connection Policy: History, Engagement, and Next Steps

Introduction and Background

Over the past three years, the City has undertaken an extensive, iterative, and highly public process to evaluate and update its sewer connection policies. This has not been a single decision point or a staff-driven change, but rather a sustained community and Council conversation with numerous opportunities for input, refinement, and reconsideration.

Since mid-2023, this topic has been discussed at regular City Council meetings, public workshops, Planning Commission meetings, special Council sessions, and through a dedicated Sewer Ordinance Committee made up of community members. This process has included multiple public hearings, draft ordinance reviews, and structured opportunities for feedback at nearly every stage.

In total, the City has held dozens of touchpoints on this issue, including:

- Repeated Council discussions spanning 2023 through 2026
- A public workshop specifically designed to introduce the ordinance and gather early community input
- A multi-meeting Sewer Ordinance Committee process focused on equity, financing, and implementation
- Ongoing Planning Commission involvement and recommendations
- Multiple public hearings with direct testimony from residents, business owners, and stakeholders
- Iterative draft revisions reflecting both technical analysis and community feedback

Throughout this process, the City has evaluated a wide range of policy approaches, including connection triggers, timelines, financial impacts, system development charge waivers, penalties, and alternatives such as standby or availability fees. Council direction has evolved over time, reflecting both policy priorities and community concerns.

Importantly, this work has been conducted in full compliance with open public meeting requirements, with discussions occurring in noticed public meetings and supported by publicly available materials, maps, and staff reports. The level of engagement on this topic has been significant, with consistent public participation and feedback shaping each phase of the work.

Most recently, in February 2026, the City Council adopted a six-month moratorium on implementation of the ordinance to allow additional time for review, refinement, and alignment. This action reflects both the complexity of the issue and the City's commitment to getting the policy right.

Taken together, this represents one of the most robust policy development efforts the City has undertaken in recent years, with substantial time, analysis, and community input already invested.

Next Steps:

The City is now positioned to move from extended review into a clear policy direction. Staff will return with a refined ordinance that reflects Council priorities, incorporates prior public input, and focuses on a balanced approach grounded in public health, affordability, and practical implementation.

This will include updated recommendations on connection triggers, timelines, and financial tools, along with a simplified framework for community review ahead of Council consideration.

Timetable: Sewer Ordinance Timeline (public engagement)

1. Jun 15 ,2023 City Council - Staff initiated discussion to change the sewer connection requirement under SMC 13..08.070 and 120
2. Aug 24, 2023 City Council - Council reviewed proposed sewer connection changes, discussed impacts, and agreed to proceed with amendments while requesting more information for the next meeting.
3. Sep 21, 2023 City Council - Public workshop introduced proposed sewer ordinance changes, shared maps and materials, and invited community input while staff explained impacts and process. Council reviewed the revised sewer ordinance draft incorporating workshop feedback and public comments, held a detailed discussion on requirements, financing, and future impacts, requested additional information, and proposed forming a citizen committee.
4. Oct 19, 2023 City Council - City updated council on forming a broadly representative sewer ordinance committee, outlining a three-meeting process to review data, analyze impacts, and present recommendations by the end of 2023.

5. Oct 30, 2023 Sewer Ordinance Committee - The committee discussed proposed sewer ordinance changes, gathered stakeholder perspectives on impacts and concerns, and established group norms while identifying key questions and next steps.
6. Nov 6, 2023 Sewer Ordinance Committee - The committee approved its charter and agreements, refined definitions of success, explored financing strategies for sewer expansion, and developed initial ideas and action steps toward an equitable ordinance proposal.
7. Nov 16, 2023 City Council -City reported two committee meetings held, ongoing work on ordinance, financial policies, and planning documents, with updates to council and a next meeting set for Dec. 4, 2024.
8. Dec 4, 2023 Sewer Ordinance Committee - The committee shared and discussed individual perspectives, identified key themes and concerns around sewer expansion and financing, and agreed on next steps toward developing a collective recommendation for City Council.
9. Dec 11, 2023 Planning Commission - Subcommittee continues septic/sewer discussions and is developing recommendations for council, while annexation discussions are on hold until that work is complete.
10. Dec 21, 2023 City Council -Public comments raised concerns about road projects, sewer moratorium, zoning density, and hookup costs; staff outlined public outreach, hearings, and committee progress, clarified permitting and timelines, and council approved rescinding the septic moratorium ordinance. 2024.
11. Jan 8, 2024 Sewer Ordinance Committee - The committee reviewed and voted on proposed sewer ordinance triggers, completed financial and evaluation surveys, and finalized key inputs and next steps to support ordinance development.
12. Jan 18, 2024 City Council - Public hearing included a presentation on the utility rate increase study and proposed system development charge changes, with public feedback on water conservation, sewer rate hikes, and cost impacts; staff also provided a sewer committee update, with further council discussion deferred to a future meeting.
13. Jan 22, 2024 Planning Commission - PC Chair Breckel updated commissioners on the sewer committee's recommendations: homeowners must connect to the system but aren't responsible for mainline extension costs; incentives and state law compliance are being explored. Annexation policy work remains pending sewer committee input.
14. Feb 15, 2024 City Council - Public comment thanked council and staff for Sewer Committee outreach. Public hearing reviewed utility rate and system development charge drafts, with feedback—especially concerns from fixed-income residents—informing the March 22, 2024 hearing. Sewer Committee update noted five meetings over three months with diverse community participation to develop ordinance changes and solutions.
15. Feb 22, 2024 Special Council -Staff presented the Sewer Committee's results and proposed ordinance changes on connection requirements; council discussed revisions and directed staff to compile a final draft for review at the March 21st meeting before further public engagement.
16. Mar 21, 2024 City Council -Public comments addressed the proposed sewer ordinance and utility rate changes, including concerns from fixed-income residents and lodging businesses. A 10% sewer rate increase for 2024 was approved (3–2 vote). Staff presented a final draft of the

updated SMC 13.08 ordinance, with further public engagement and informational materials to be scheduled; discussion was moved to the April 18, 2024, council meeting.

17. Apr 18, 2024 City Council -City Administrator Kinley presented draft ordinances and a staff memo on utility rates and system development charges, clarifying 2024 increases (10% sewer, 5.5% water) and billing structure, with further ordinances to be presented in May 2024 for public hearings. Community Development Director Shumaker shared a draft updated SMC 13.08 sewer ordinance; council agreed to require sewer connections for lots with three dwellings or more than two lot divisions, but further revisions are needed before public release.
18. May 16, 2024 City Council -Staff presented a revised draft of SMC 13.08 Sewer Pretreatment, detailing updates and clarifications on connection responsibilities, fees, appeals, and rate adjustments. Council discussed various considerations, including latecomer fees, standby charges, and reserve funding, and by consensus agreed to release the draft for public comment.
19. Aug 7, 2024 City Council - Council directed staff to adopt a mandatory connection with penalties model instead of the standby fee option, retain the System Development Charges waiver with strengthened language to address public funding concerns, and prepare a revised draft ordinance for council review before public release.
20. Sep 19, 2024 City Council - Public comment thanked staff and the Sewer Ordinance Committee and highlighted draft Section F. Staff presented a memo on the proposed ordinance from the August 7th discussion, and council authorized releasing the draft for public review (3–2 vote).
21. Apr 14, 2025 Planning Commission - Community Development Director Shumaker reported on the first sewer ordinance workshop, noting light attendance and providing connection options for homeowners; a public hearing is scheduled for April 17. Planning Commissioners discussed the ordinance, agreeing it is feasible for property owners and that further annexation policy work depends on its passage.
22. Apr 17, 2025 City Council - The public hearing on the Sewer & Pretreatment Ordinance opened with a staff presentation highlighting revisions, including redefining sewer “availability,” financial assistance for low- to moderate-income owners, and connection penalties with reduced fees for timely compliance. Maps and timelines for sewer extensions were shared. Public comments were mixed: 3 comments supported the ordinance with suggestions, while other 3 opposed mandatory connections for functioning septic systems. Council held detailed discussion on timelines, penalties, costs, and system development charges, and planned a workshop with the new City Manager. A revised ordinance will be presented at the May City Council meeting.
23. May 15, 2025 City Council - Public comment focused on penalties in the proposed sewer/septic ordinance. Community Development Director Shumaker presented updates, including longer connection timelines, incentives, SDC waivers, appeal processes, and penalty adjustments. Rick Jessell supported the ordinance, suggesting removal of Section F; no opposition or neutral comments were received. Council discussed unresolved issues, including rate impacts, septic properties along sewer mains, and development considerations, and planned a workshop/special meeting before the June 2025 Council meeting to address these questions.
24. Jun 16, 2025 Special Council - Public comments highlighted concerns about the sewer ordinance, including the need for more data, slowing the decision process, homeowner costs, and past

enforcement issues affecting the wastewater treatment plant. Council reviewed 26 suggested changes to the draft ordinance using a thumbs-up/thumbs-down exercise, approving 9 changes for incorporation. They unanimously set two next steps: release the draft ordinance for public comment and present options for the fine amount for consideration.

25. Jul 17, 2025 City Council - Staff report
26. Aug 21, 2025 City Council – Received public comment on the sewer ordinance, expressing concern about hookup costs, suggesting the brewing industry could help reduce waste, and noting requested system analysis data was not received.
27. Feb 19, 2026 City Council - Public comments addressed the sewer ordinance, with Brian McNamara advocating for direct communication with affected property owners and fee waivers, and Scott Robinson raising concerns about costs and decommissioning a working septic system. Mayor Taylor proposed delaying implementation for further discussion. The council, via a resolution, adopted a six-month moratorium on enforcement, fees, and penalties of the sewer ordinance, effective immediately and not extending beyond August 31, 2026 (approved unanimously by five councilmembers).