

# Sanitary Sewer Laterals

A Policy Establishing City's Responsibility for the Ownership and Maintenance  
Updated January 2021

**POLICY STATEMENT:** The City of Oregon City is the provider of a municipal sanitary sewer collection service. In that effort the City will maintain and repair all "public" sewer lines. Private property owners shall be responsible for the cleaning, maintenance, and repair of "private" sewer lines.

**PURPOSE OF THE POLICY:** This policy provides guidance regarding the City's roles and responsibilities related to operation, maintenance, and repair of individual sanitary sewer service lines. This policy also provides controls regarding claims for damages for sewer flooding resulting from a defective or inadequately maintained sewer line.

## DEFINITIONS:

- Private sewer lateral – *The section of sewer lateral from the building to where it crosses a street face-of-curb line, or a street edge of pavement line. In the situation where the main line is located inside an easement, the lateral, in its entirety is considered "private".*
- Public sewer lateral - *The section of sewer lateral from the sewer mainline (as defined in Oregon City Map) to where it crosses a street face-of-curb line, or a street edge of pavement line. If the situation is that the face of curb or edge of pavement does not apply (unimproved right-of-way, public alley), the right-of-way line would be the downstream boundary of the "private" sewer lateral. The balance of the lateral is considered "public".*
- Structural failures – *Structural failures are the only type of failures the City will evaluate and repair if needed. Some examples of structural failures include defects such as: breaks, cracks, holes, offset joints, excessively wide joints, significant bellies, pipes at the end of their life expectancy. **Structural failures in a "public" sewer lateral, is the only type of damage that the City will repair.***
- Root blockage – *Roots from trees and shrubs that infiltrate into a sewer pipe and result in a line blockage. **Root blockages in a "public" sewer lateral are not considered structural failure and will not be repaired by the City unless it is determined that the blockage is combined with a structural failure.***
- Debris Blockage – *Debris blockage results from foreign material (grease, gravel, trash, rags, toys, etc.) collecting in the sewer lateral resulting in a line blockage. **Debris blockage in a "public" sewer lateral is not considered structural failure and will not be repaired by the City unless it is determined that the blockage is combined with a structural failure.***

**GUIDELINES:** Lateral Maintenance Responsibility - Individual sewer laterals are typically used by one individual property owner. The City is responsible for maintaining the structural integrity of all public sewer lines including “public” sewer laterals. Private property owners are responsible for maintaining all “private” sewer laterals.

**New Construction** – New development is required to obtain a plumbing permit and construct an individual sewer lateral for each property. For new subdivisions the “public” sewer lateral is typically installed and inspected during the subdivision construction. For new infill development the “public” sewer lateral is typically installed by the homebuilder and under the authorization of a permit to work in the right-of-way and the City inspects it.

**Sewer Lateral Repairs** – All sewer lateral repairs not completed by the City shall require a permit to complete the work. All “private” sewer lateral construction requires a City plumbing permit and construction of a “public” sewer lateral requires a right-of-way permit.

**Inspection** – All “private” and “public” sewer lateral construction must be inspected upon installation or repair.

**Verification of sewer lateral problems areas** – Verification of a sewer lateral problem area and determination of its location is the responsibility of the property owner who owns the “private” lateral. In most cases the most convenient access point available to evaluate problem areas is a plumbing cleanout or along the plumbing somewhere inside the house foundation. The City will consult with the property owner and stay in contact to obtain updates on the progress of the pipeline assessment. For determination of City responsibility, the property owner is required to provide the City with a video recording of the service lateral camera inspection. The video recording shall depict the problem and indicate a location using a measured footage from a reference point and an estimated lateral alignment.

**Reimbursement for the cost of verification** – If the blockage is a structural failure blockage in the “public” sewer lateral, the City will reimburse the property owner for the expense of the verification effort. Typically, this reimbursement can be arranged through the Sewer Division Manager.

**Claims for Damages** – When damage to private property occurs as a result of a line blockage the City will respond as soon as possible. A City representative will visit the scene to assess the situation and confirm with the person on site what the next steps recommended by the City. If property damage has resulted the City representative may complete an initial review of the damages and provide the property owner or tenant with information that will help the property owner submit the claim. Claim forms need to be completed and submitted to the City Recorder’s office where they will be forwarded to the City’s insurance carrier. The City’s insurance carrier will determine whether the City may have any responsibility for additional clean-up costs and property. A reasonable effort will be made to resolve the claims unless they are due to actions of third parties or the homeowners themselves.