

City of Bay Village

Minutes of Public Improvements, Streets, Sewers and Drainage Committee
Council Chambers

January 30, 2024
5:30 p.m.

Agenda: Discussion of Basement Sewer Guide

Lydia DeGeorge, Chairman
Dave Long
Peter Winzig

Lydia DeGeorge, Chairman, presiding

Lydia DeGeorge, Vice President of Council and Councilwoman, Ward 2, and Chairman of the Public Improvements, Streets, Sewers and Drainage Committee called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. Also present was Dave Long, Councilman, Ward 1. Peter J. Winzig, Councilman-at-large, joined as the meeting progressed.

Also Present:

Law Director Barbour, Director of Public Service and Properties Liskovec, Building Director Tuck-Macalla, Ward 4 Councilman Dan Rettig, Councilwoman at large Sara Byrnes Maier.

Audience:

Dan Straitiff, Martha Raymond, Debra Jewisionowski, Larry J. Meyers.

Ms. DeGeorge advised that the purpose of the meeting and the reason that it was called was because of the amount of feedback that Council received on the basement sewer guide created by the administration recently. It was felt that it was much easier to have this discussion in person than to try to review points sent through email. Ms. DeGeorge noted that she had not originally intended for any of the directors to be present because nothing technical was to be discussed, but welcomed them to the meeting and any logic to the guide they might submit. Also joining this evening are Council members Dan Rettig (Ward 4) and Sara Byrnes Maier (Council-at-large).

It was noted that everyone on Council agreed that the draft of the basement sewer guide that was given to Council from the administration should be redone by a professional printer. Some of the templates were a little off, and Council would very much like to see the guide mailed to every home, and also appear on the city website. Possibly, some additional information on the website, keeping in mind that not everyone has access to a computer. It was felt that some of the things didn't belong in a guide mailed to homes. Most of the feedback centered around the order of information, based on residents' questions and input. Should we include indexes and definitions? Some residents may want to show their plumbers the guide. There should be some care taken in not to over explain things that plumbers should know and should explain on their own. It was questioned whether the guide should be shortened. Right now, it is about eleven pages, including an appendix. They would like to see it at about five or six pages, if at all

possible. To be looked at tonight is what can be taken out of the guide, versus what can be put on the website. The goal is to cut the product in half.

Some of the email comments included one that stated that city responsibility should be front and center. We do not want the guide to come across as solely what the residents should do. Residents have asked what they can do, or should do, and it is certainly the intent to address that, but they also want residents to know what is happening on the city side. It will be dated, so there will be an understanding that the information will be updated to give them dollar amounts and what will happen going forward.

There were suggestions in the emails from Council as they reviewed the document that seemed contradictory to each other, but she summarized the comments regardless of whether they were contradictory or not, knowing that the administration would decide which way they wanted to proceed.

Ms. DeGeorge asked the committee to review the draft document and to provide feedback of what should be on the first page. Ms. DeGeorge stated that the question she was asked more often than not when dealing with residents was, "What should I do?" Ideally, not every resident wants to contact their insurance company, but that should be at the top of their list if that is something they want to do. One of the first things they should do is to report the flooding to the Service Department. The phone number should be added to the guide – there are no numbers in the guide currently. The number should be the non-emergency number and should reflect what is on the city website. Understanding water in the basement, if the breaker isn't in the basement the breaker can be shut off. You should not unplug appliances. That is what the non-emergency number would be for. Residents want to hear what the City is doing, and we should be beholden to tell them. Give them the basics on the paper guide, and then a little more information, along with particulars, on the City's website.

Councilman Dave Long stated that generally the flow is the main point to be brought up with as much information as possible – it's all useful and helpful. Understanding that the idea is to try to trim it down, but from a resident's standpoint, what is most important, what is relevant, what do I need to know, potentially showing it to the resident's plumber, does it flow that way? There are some relevant points in the email. The picture of the sign isn't necessary. Mr. Long stated that he feels the more information the better, and it doesn't need to be trimmed down just for the sake of trimming it down. Especially if it is a pdf on the website and it would be useful for the residents to have a handy packet like this. Cutting it down to less pages is not the number one thing to focus on.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that there is reference in the draft in regard to inflow and infiltration. And while Mr. Winzig feels that this is something that residents need to know about, is it something that necessarily needs to be included in the paper guide, if it is something that can be addressed on the web site? And, if are we going to do that someone is going to have to put that information out there. Are we going to have the same document, and then additions to it that people can get into deeper on the website? That would change the trajectory of what we are looking at in this draft. The standpipes and the backwater valves could be things that are addressed on the website, but should be things that are addressed with a plumber, as opposed to the City making

suggestions. Ms. DeGeorge stated that it has been her experience that residents take it to heart when the City makes suggestions and then say that the city told them to do certain things, when in fact these are just suggestions. Residents want to know how they can prevent flooding, but that is when you need to bring in a plumber who is knowledgeable in all these aspects and can refer to something else.

Mr. Long stated that the main point of having it on the website is that information can be condensed by having hyperlinks that can connect to information. When it is mailed out to residents let them know that there are hyperlinks on the website for more in-depth information for the sections.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that another thing they would like to see in the draft is an index, or indexes. If there is an index on page one or two, they can find the answer to what they should do. Then, at their leisure they can flip through and find how their house is connected, how the city streets work, where the water goes, etc. If there is no index the residents will just be seeking through the material, looking for what is important to them. Different things are important to different people in this situation. Some people really want to know what the City is doing, and other residents want to know first and foremost what they can do.

Law Director Barbour stated that having an index is not going to reduce the number of pages. Other cities have done this, i.e., Westlake's is 36 pages.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that Westlake's is on their website. We were discussing sending this to homes and it is too much to be mailed to homes. Maybe the important information can go to the homes and if need be a longer document on the website.

Mr. Barbour stated that when the Bay document originally got off the ground it was to provide residents with a very basic understanding of how the sanitary and storm sewers work, in the most basic sense. We spend a lot of time in meetings talking about things. It assumes a certain baseline and goes from there. The idea was to provide that kind of baseline as to how it works. That was the only real purpose of it. The Mayor's newsletter contain the plans for sewer work.

Ms. DeGeorge asked Mr. Barbour what he would want to see on the first page of the basement sewer guide.

Mr. Barbour stated that a lot of people know who to call: the Service Department and a plumber, probably in that order or reverse order depending on the circumstances. The document isn't designed to be something that someone is going to pull out when the water is coming up through their floor drain, and then go through the document. The way it is designed and thought of is here is how the basic system works so as we go forward and talk about improvements to a resident's street, or improvements to the overall system, or appropriating money, testing, and all things that have to take place to reach a reasonable solution and solve the problem on a grand scale, there would be a baseline of understanding of what we are talking about. One of the things we know is that all houses have different connections, based on their age and location. One of the things we wanted to avoid was a description that is too generic, because of the different ways and years a home was built. Two houses next to each other can have different situations. The

Special Meeting of Council
January 30, 2024

guide is really just to inform people. If there is a different vision for it, that is something to be considered.

Ms. DeGeorge called upon the residents present to comment on what they would like to see in a basement sewer guide.

Dan Straitiff, Manchester Dr., states that he thinks if we can we should cause the community to have the same vocabulary. Storm water is different than sanitary water. He would not shy away from that basic education, and have that early on. The top of page one should be key numbers to know; key contacts in case there is a problem. A big chunk of basic education is hugely valuable. The matter of inflow and infiltration was brought up. The City is about to subject the community to smoke and dye testing, at a cost of \$730,000. All of that is inflow and infiltration. Take this moment to educate about water getting in the wrong places for these reasons. That should be included even in the guide going to the homes. It can be short and amplified on the website, but you have a lot of awareness because of last summer. I would not say it can only be five pages. The value proposition here is residential education so we can all be in this together going forward.

Mr. Long stated that a lot of information should be an illustration of what a typical house looks like and a list of things that are the responsibility of a homeowner. Please make sure these items have been taken care of before you blame the City and Service Department. Additionally, after you have seen that and taken care of everything there, it goes on to explain that the storms that we have had are record setting, the other reasons why water can come into the basement of your home even after you have done everything we are asking you to do. From there continue to explain additional steps, i.e., sub pumps and water proofing, basic steps if affordable, and basic maintenance that should not be ignored.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that one of the comments that was made was the maintenance to the homes, but the City didn't address the maintenance work done by the City.

Debra Jesionowski, Russell Road, stated that preventative maintenance needs to be explained, and what are emergency type situations and what the City is doing for proactive preventive maintenance for the longer term. This is an opportunity for education. The way the guide is set up there is no hierarchy and the homeowner doesn't know what is important and where to look. If someone professional lays it out you can tell them the main points you want to get across. The graphics can be improved, and a lot of it just lacks clarity.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that the content is accurate, which is why we didn't want to discuss the technicality of the information. It is just a matter of in what order of importance is the information, and is there something that can be left out. Council did not create the document; the administration created it.

Mr. Barbour stated that information obtained from other cities was reviewed and an outline was created. Items of importance were chosen and filled in with text. The attempt was to keep it simple and short, like a newsletter type document with the idea originally of more of an

Special Meeting of Council
January 30, 2024

educational piece. There is a lot to be covered in this topic and it still would not address every individual situation.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that it is important that the points are laser-pointed – that we do all have the same language, we are all on the same page, we do know what is important, but how much of the language can be removed. Council comments include that there are some places in the document that the language is contradictory.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that she does not think a definition page is necessary. Surcharge is explained. Inflow and Infiltration (I&I) is a City issue, but residents feel it is important because that is what caused the flooding last summer.

Mr. Barbour noted that I&I can take place on private property. Mr. Liskovec noted that the City of Lakewood conducted a very expensive program in 2016 and the end result was that a lot of the I&I from underneath homes was resolved. It is a global issue.

In regard to suggestions, he submitted for the document, Mr. Winzig stated that he rewrote the entire document. He stated that 90% of the guide created by the administration is really good, he just tried to put it in an order for the homeowner. One section he added was a history of the City, how it is made up of sanitary sewer lines, outlet points, how the system functions, pump stations throughout the City, the water flows to Rocky River Wastewater Treatment Plant, storm systems throughout the City, and laterals, etc. A brief overview of our City, how the system is set up and what it is intended to do, is important. Quite a few cities found on the internet have documents like this, some very extensive, and they include a glossary. Mr. Winzig stated he feels that after making sure the content is all good it should be sent to someone to have it all laid out.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that all are in agreement it should go out to a professional printer. There was mixed feedback from Council on some of the other things, i.e., what should be in the paper guide, and/or online. Mr. Winzig noted that when a document like this is created, there is a pdf version that can sit online. If recommendations are to be included, while the City doesn't want to make recommendations on specific companies, a link could be included that would take the reader to a list of people who have done work in the City. More information, i.e., water infiltration in homes, could be made accessible to the reader by the inclusion of links.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that she concurs with a suggestion by one of the Council to address the soil composition within the City.

Building Director Tuck-Macalla stated that he thinks this is a technical area. The soil composition is the same in Avon, North Olmsted, Rocky River, and all of northeast Ohio. Systems are designed for northeast Ohio soil.

Mr. Straitiff noted that in 2015 he had his foundation excavated, and whatever was used against the foundation had become compacted. That was replaced with correct aggregate against the foundation. There is nothing that can be done with the other 95% of the soil surrounding the property.

Special Meeting of Council
January 30, 2024

Mr. Barbour stated that the Mayor's office put the guide into the form that is being reviewed. Discussion at that time included the City ordinances, how they work together, what the departments do when there is a problem and what is in place to address it.

Ms. DeGeorge reviewed comments from members of Council submitted to her by email, including the following:

"Were bullet points or simplified Q&A's discussed?"

"Index, table of contents, numbered sections, so residents can move around?"

Mr. Barbour stated that the above topics were not discussed when the guide was created. They were looking at it is just a document that starts with the house, how it is connected to the storm and sanitary lines, where does the water go, and how basements get flooded.

Soil composition is off the table.

City responsibility – Can that be more in depth?

Mr. Long suggested a simple table with checkmarks might make it more easily understood. City responsibility – yes or no. Homeowners responsibility – yes or no.

Mr. Barbour noted that the City created a sanitary and storm system. Getting the water to the system is resident responsibility.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that we are talking about telling the residents what they can do on their property and what the City can do to address flooding.

Mr. Straitiff commented that the City maintains an annual program where we inspect 150 linear miles of lines in an annual inspection program, cleaning per need. The guide could say that for a detailed list of the current plan, the City website has the specifics on upcoming projects and plans. Generic language of the City Service Department sewage problem, inspection and repair, should be included.

Mr. Barbour stated that the reason that information is not in the guide is that the guide is a primer on how homes are connected to the sewers.

Included in the comments Ms. DeGeorge received via email from Council members, was the comment that the guide makes it sound like everything is resident responsibility. We explain how we are connected, but it seems like it is putting it back on a resident and the City needs to assume some of that responsibility.

Ms. Jesionowski expressed favor with Mr. Long's suggestion of a check list, easy to digest and eye-catching, and then digging deeper into those points in this tutorial, providing basic knowledge to be discussed with a plumber or the City.

Special Meeting of Council
January 30, 2024

Mr. Straitiff stated that if he received the document and it was silent on the City doing anything he would be very unhappy. It has to be a demonstrated partnership. If the title of the document is "Residential Guide to your Sanitary Sewer System", we know it is about the residential side, but it can't be silent on the City doing anything.

Mr. Barbour stated that there has been a lot of communication with residents about things that are going to be done in the future.

Mr. Long stated that the city involvement does have to be addressed, but home ownership is an investment and it must be pointed out that the homeowner does have a lot of responsibility to keep water out of their basement and certain measures that need to be taken. That is what the homeowner has to learn from this document.

Martha Raymond, Lincoln Road, stated that whenever her basement flooded she never called the City, knowing that oak trees on her property caused the problem. The last flooding included sewer water and she thought that the storm lines were full. She did not understand how all that was connected.

Mr. Long stated that there is a section in the guide that explains why there is still water in the basement if all the steps are being taken by the homeowner. The guide goes over the situation of how water makes its way into the basement.

Ms. Raymond commented on the different size of sewer lines interconnecting in the City, causing some water to be pushed back.

Ms. DeGeorge asked for further comments.

Mr. Barbour stated that based on the comments presented this evening the administration will take another hard look at the guide.

Mr. Rettig asked if there is a timeframe on which the guide will be published.

Mr. Barbour stated that they will try to get it out as soon as possible, while taking into consideration all the steps necessary to lead to publication.

Mr. Long compared a car manual usefulness to the use of the guide. A glossary would also be helpful. Hyperlinks should be widely used when putting the guide on the website, providing sources of information, and city ordinances.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that one of the members of Council suggested adding bullet points, the point being to make the document simpler.

If the administration re-works the guide, the Public Improvements Committee would like an opportunity to see it again.

Special Meeting of Council
January 30, 2024

Mr. Rettig noted that the point of having the guide on the website is being able to refine it and make it a living document that can be updated.

Mr. Straitiff stated that the title of this meeting was "Discussion of Basement Sewer Guide."

Ms. DeGeorge stated that the title given to the guide is "Homeowner's Guide to Basement Sewers."

Mr. Long noted that there are homes that do not have basements.

Mr. Straitiff that the topic discussed goes from the lateral to the gutters. He suggested removing the word "basement" and naming it "Residential Sewer Guide." This still puts the emphasis that the main content is the residential perspective. The word "basement" is distracting.

Ms. Raymond suggested that any information should be searchable after downloading the entire pdf document to a computer.

Mr. Barbour stated that the administration was trying to stay away from a textbook, which is why an index or glossary was not included. The document was meant to provide information on how homes are connected to the two sewer systems of the City, and things the homeowners need to know.

Ms. DeGeorge stated that if the document is online more information is better. Less information is better on the printed document. It is important for residents to know which department to go to and the difference between the Service Department and the Building Department, and how the departments can assist residents seeking help or information. We have a group of educated residents, but we are talking about people who need help when there is water in their basement. We need to think about those residents.

Mr. Long stated that even if the present document went out it still would have been very helpful and informative. It is not a bad start.

Mr. Barbour stated that in a perfect circumstance the resident will realize the need to call a plumber to help them with their particular situation. A lot of people never get their laterals cleaned, or have them cleaned the wrong way. That is more of the thought process. Every eventuality is not going to be covered.

Mr. Winzig suggested a cover letter describing that point be included with the document.


Mr. Barbour stated that a lot of time and effort went into the document. The goals desired were achieved. The committee has pointed out some other goals to be achieved, and those will be addressed. This is beneficial, but it will be up to other administrative people to decide if they will be included.

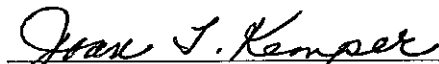
Special Meeting of Council
January 30, 2024

Ms. DeGeorge suggested that use of the word “collaboration” is very important because it is the residents and the City doing their part, collaborating to make sure that the flooding that occurred last summer does not happen again.

There being no further business to discuss this evening, the meeting adjourned at 6:30 p.m. Further comments will be welcomed via email to any of the committee members via email.

Ldegeorge@cityofbayvillage.com
Dlong@cityofbayvillage.com
Pwinzig@cityofbayvillage.com


Lydia DeGeorge, Vice President of Council
Councilwoman, Ward 2


Joan T. Kemper, Clerk of Council