

PRIORITY/ACTION TITLE: Side Sewer Assistance Program

Branch/Division: Drainage & Wastewater

Executive Sponsor: Andrew Lee

Project Manage/Lead: Kevin Burrell

Priority/Action Type:

- 2018-2023 Existing Action Plan with **continued** funding for 2021-2026
- 2018-2023 Existing Action Plan with **increased** funding for 2021-2026
- New Priority requiring new funding
- Priority with existing funding

Summary of the priority or issue.

- What is the issue or problem and why is it important? What data do we have that indicates this an important problem or issue to address? Use charts, graphs, and tables.

Side sewers are an important component of Seattle’s collective sewerage system. SPU maintains approximately 1,400 miles of sewer mainlines whereas customers are responsible for roughly 4,100 miles of pipe. Poorly maintained side sewers can lead to problems for our customers and for SPU. Unfortunately, many side sewers in Seattle are coming to the end of their useful life and most customers are unaware that they own and need to maintain them.

Each year more than 3,000 side sewer permits (those not associated with development) are issued to customers to make repairs on private property and in the right of way. Costs can range from several thousand dollars to many tens of thousands of dollars, especially when street and sidewalk restoration is required. Our research suggests that customers will ignore their side sewer until they experience a backup or it completely fails, and they will likely fix what is needed – instead of repairing or replacing the entire pipe. We also know that some customers don’t have the wealth or income to pay up front or finance the costs to maintain, repair or replace their side sewers.

The status quo is neither a benefit to the customer in terms of total life-cycle costs nor is it a benefit to the long-term capacity and operation of SPU’s systems. SPU uses staff time and resources responding to hundreds of emergency calls from customers each year only to find that nearly 9 out of 10 times the issue stems from the side sewer. Emergency repair situations also puts SPU customers at a disadvantage. Our research indicates that most customers don’t understand the permitting and repair process and they are left to make significant financial decisions under duress. They most likely will opt for the least expensive fix, as opposed to the solution that will cost less over the full life of the asset.

Part 2. Targeted Commitments and Performance Measures (next 3-6 years).

- What are we doing, or will we do to address the priority problem or issue?

DWW is developing a business case with several programmatic options that will help alleviate side sewer repair costs for customers. We will also use Human Centered Design to test and prototype program designs and collect feedback through outreach, focus groups and customer interviews. Using the preferred alternative(s), we will develop an implementation plan with strategies and tactics to pilot the program starting in 2021. In 2022, program design adjustments will be made based on customer surveys or interviews. The initiative would be complete with a full-scale program moving forward by the end of 2023. The program would move to baseline in 2024.

Year	Milestones	Anticipated Outcomes
2020	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Business Case - Customer Engagement - Draft Implementation & Outreach Plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Options & Costs - Preferred Customer Alternative(s) - Pilot Implementation Plan
2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Outreach Materials & Customer Engagement - Pilot Test & Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program Awareness - Program Enrollment
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Feedback & Evaluation - Refine Program Design, Continue Enrollment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Survey or Interview Data - Program Participation
2023 - 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Full-scale Program Implementation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Program Participation

- What are the short and long-term metrics for measuring progress? How will you measure whether the action has been successful?

The short-term goal is to identify and test program approaches that are of value to customers that help reduce the costs of owning and maintaining side sewers. Early and ongoing program enrollment will indicate whether the design and outreach plan were effective. And, survey or customer interviews will describe if we're meeting customer expectations and overall program design and delivery methods. The distribution of customers and any demographic information we may be able to collect will also indicate if the program design is equitable, and if further adjustments need to be made.

The long-term goal (beyond the SBP planning horizon) is to reduce customer's full life cycle costs of owning and maintaining side sewers while also reducing the level of effort required by SPU to respond to or mitigate customer-related side sewer issues. If successful, we would expect to see changes in customer behaviors and attitudes towards maintaining side sewers, and an orientation towards being more proactive, rather than reactive. We would also look for a reduction in side-sewer related emergency calls to SPU and a downward trend in annual side sewer repair permits (not associated with development) over time.

Part 3. Baseline Activities and Anticipated Rate Impact

- Short description of activities already in the baseline, incremental work.

DWW is working with existing (0.5FTE) and consultant resources (\$ TBD) to support policy and business case development, as well as program design in 2020. DWW staff (0.5FTE) are also developing a customer engagement strategy in 2020 for side sewers using existing resources which this program will leverage. That work also includes consultant outreach support using an existing contract but with new funding (\$ TBD) beginning in 2021. Depending upon the preferred alternative, a dedicated program coordinator (.5FTE) or program manager (1.0) reallocated from other work is also anticipated with pilot initiation Q3 2021.

- Include a financial summary (table) 2021-2026.

Year	Activity	Cost
2020	Business Case & Customer Feedback	\$0
2021	Outreach & Engagement, Pilot Initiation	\$200,000
2022	Pilot Implementation & Evaluation	\$500,000
2023	Full-scale Implementation	\$1,000,000
2024	Move to baseline	\$1,000,000

- What is the anticipated additional rate impact of what we're planning on doing (if any)?

The above table illustrates the anticipated expenditures from 2020 through 2023 which includes an initial pilot and ramping up of the program. The current plan for the pilot program is to move to baseline in 2024 with \$1M annual expenditures. We are planning to fund this program by reallocating existing resources and anticipate no net rate increase within DWW rates from this pilot program.

Part 4. Alternatives Considered & Race and Social Justice Considerations

- What alternatives were considered in addition to what is being recommended (if any)? How would these alternatives impact service levels?

There are several alternatives (table below) that are being analyzed and a recommendation is expected Q2 2020. The alternatives range from small financial incentives (rebates, grants) to side sewer repair programs which would cover customer costs for repairs in the right of way.

Program Alternatives	Customers Served	Annual Costs
Rebates	100's	\$100,000
Grants & Loans	10's	\$1,000,000
Utility Insurance	100's	\$10,000,000
Utility Side Sewer Program	1,000's	\$100,000,000

Over time, we expect that each option will reduce SPU costs related to investigating customer side sewer emergencies. One alternative proposes to use crew or crew-lead contractor work which would reduce crew capacity for planning & scheduling and field work for existing core work. One option houses the program outside of SPU, so little or no change in services levels is expected. Each program design will require some level of contracted outreach support for equitable service delivery.

- Identify possible race and social justice implications of work to address this priority. Will this impact service equity?

The status quo already benefits customers who know how to access SPU to seek help during emergencies or make claims related to issues stemming from their side sewers. Those customers are likely to speak English and have more income, wealth or access to capital to deal with an emergency or finance the long-term expense of replacing a side sewer. The program options that have been identified would support all customers. However, with limited resources available, the effort would prioritize low- or fixed-income customers.

The program will also rely on consultant support to engage customers and community-based organizations to eliminate unnecessary barriers to participate.