

West Cocalico Township Authority

Frequently Asked Questions

Blainsport, Galen Hall, Resh Road, and Rose Drive Sewer Extensions

1. Why is the sewer system expanding?

The West Cocalico Township Authority (Authority), which is regulated by the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection (PADEP), has developed a planning document that identifies and resolves existing sewage collection and disposal needs, both for the customer and the Authority. This plan, which is commonly called an “Act 537 Plan”, was prepared and adopted by the Township in December 2018 then submitted to and approved by PADEP in March 2019. The main purpose of the plan is to protect the public health and the environment from failing on-lot septic systems, overloaded collection systems (sewer pipe and manholes) and identify improvements to the Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP) to maintain operational and regulatory compliance. During the on-lot surveys conducted in 2016, many properties demonstrated signs of failing septic systems. Failed septic systems pose health risks to the community, environment and public water system wells. For the Authority, major improvements and upgrades to the WWTP and primary sewer interceptor are necessary to achieve permit compliance. So both you, as the customer, and us as the Authority are in this together in resolving and implementing the improvements and upgrades identified in the Act 537 Plan. The Authority is now taking the next steps, moving forward with design and construction as part of the plan.

2. Why is the Wastewater Treatment Plant being upgraded?

The Authority is in the process of relocating and expanding their WWTP in an effort to provide additional capacity, to modernize its treatment technology, and to address stringent discharge requirements that will be imposed by the PADEP. The Authority has had a moratorium on new sewer connections since the early 1990s due to the WWTP being at capacity. This has limited the growth opportunities of local businesses as well as other development in the Reinholds area. There are currently vacant business buildings that cannot be utilized by interested businesses, because the sewer capacity is not currently available for them to operate their chosen business and so these buildings remain empty until the WWTP is upgraded.

3. Where is the sewer expanding?

Public sewer is being extended to portions of Rose Drive, Resh Road, Galen Hall Road, and the Blainsport area. All homes and businesses within 150 feet of public sewer will be required to connect as set forth in the Authority’s Rules and Regulations. Additional information regarding the Authority Rules and Regulations can be found on the Township’s website.

4. What is a public sewer system?

A public sewer system collects your home's or business's wastewater (sewage, shower, kitchen, laundry water etc.). It transports it via underground piping to be treated at the WWTP before final discharge to Little Cocalico Creek.

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5. How much will this cost me?

The cost to connect to the collection system will include; Authority “Tapping Fee”, which is sometimes referred to as a connection fee. This fee is set by the Authority and is intended to offset the installation cost of the new sewer lateral from the main to the right-of-way line, and debt service from the existing collection lines and capacity related facilities. The current Authority tapping fee is \$4,200. Properties will also need to have their on-lot system abandoned and install/connect to the Authority system at the right-of-way line. These costs will vary from property to property and we encourage you to contact a plumber or contractor to help you determine these costs. These expenses (in addition to the tapping fee) will not be required until the new sewer is installed, which is tentatively scheduled for 2023. Financial assistance is available. Low-interest loans and grants are available through PENNVEST and USDA Rural Development and we have additional information on the Township’s website for your use. Lastly, once you connect to the sewer (2023), you will be responsible for paying a quarterly sewer rate. The quarterly rate for 2021 will be \$184 per Equivalent Dwelling Unit (EDU).

6. Do I have to connect to the new sewer system?

Yes. All occupied structures within 150 feet of the new sewer main will be required to connect to the public sewer as set forth in the Authority’s Rules and Regulations. All on-lot sewer systems must be abandoned. The Township will verify that occupied structures are connected to sewer, and on-lot systems are abandoned.

7. My on-lot system is fine. Why must I abandon it?

Your area was identified as a sewage needs area, meaning some of your neighbors may have failed or failing septic systems. On-lot systems, like everything, do not last forever. Even if your system is currently fine, your system may fail, and you would be facing significant costs to repair or replace your system. Failed on-lot systems cause water pollution and health risks. The public sewer expansion is a positive long-term solution for everyone in the community.

8. When will I know if I need a gravity or grinder pump connection?

All occupied properties in the Galen Hall area and in the Blainsport area west of Windy Mansion Road will have a grinder pump connection. Most other areas will have gravity connections. See the map on the next page. Even if gravity sewer is planned for your area, you may need a grinder pump if you have a toilet or sink in your basement. Further details will be provided before the construction of the sewer extensions.

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9. What is a grinder pump?

A grinder pump is a wastewater conveyance device. A grinder pump works like a household garbage disposal, but on a larger scale. It grinds up wastewater produced in your home (i.e., toilet use, shower, washing machine, etc.). It then pumps the wastewater into the public sewer system. A grinder pump is placed in a tank buried in a convenient outdoor location on a homeowner's property. The tank provides wastewater holding storage capacity. When water is used in the house, wastewater flows into the tank. When the wastewater in the tank reaches a pre-set level, the grinder pump automatically turns on, grinds the waste, and pumps it out of the tank via the homeowner's on-site sewer service line and into the public sewer system. A grinder pump will generally run for one or two minutes and automatically turn off when the tank is emptied. The pump is powered by electricity and is connected to a control panel near your electric meter.

10. Do I need to find and hire a contractor for the connection?

Yes. It will be the property owner's responsibility to install a sewer connection from the road right-of-way to your home or business in accordance with the Authority Rules and Regulations. The Authority may also allow property owners to install the facilities themselves provided they meet the construction requirements set forth. Further details will be provided before the construction of the sewer extensions.

11. Who maintains the sewer once it is installed?

The sewer lateral portion from the road right-of-way to the home or business will be installed, owned, and maintained by the property owner, including the grinder pump (if required). All other sewer portions will be installed, owned, and maintained by the Authority.

12. Why must I pay a quarterly sewer bill?

The quarterly sewer bill pays the cost to operate and maintain the wastewater treatment plant and sewer collection (pipe) system. The costs include plant upgrades and expansions to meet increased sewer demands and to meet current treatment regulations. The costs also include routine maintenance and replacement of equipment and infrastructure at the plant and the sewer collection system.

13. What is gravity sewer?

A network of underground pipes that conveys sewage by gravity, flowing downhill.

14. What is a low-pressure sewer?

Low-pressure sanitary sewers are a solution to provide the public with sanitary sewers who live within terrain with a topography in which gravity sewers cannot be easily installed. Unlike a gravity connection, low-pressure sewers use a small pump station located at each house to convey wastewater through pipes to a discharge point in the gravity sewer system or at the wastewater plant. This is a "pressure" piped system similar to a water system.

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15. Why do some homes or businesses need grinder pumps?

In most instances, wastewater can flow by gravity from a home or business to a public sewer main. From the sewer main, wastewater travels to a wastewater treatment plant. However, because of elevation, gravity may not work in all instances. In situations where a home or business's sewer line leaves the building at a lower elevation than the public sewer main, a grinder pump is used to grind and pump wastewater to the main.

16. What can I do to protect my grinder pump?

A properly maintained grinder pump is able to handle wastewater from the kitchen, bathroom, laundry, etc. However, some chemicals and substances can adversely impact a grinder pump and may cause safety hazards. Please check the labels on all chemicals before using/disposing of them. Also, never pour the following items down drains or flush the following down toilets:

- Grease (a byproduct of cooking that comes from meat fats, oils, shortening, butter, margarine, food scraps, sauces, and dairy products);
- Explosive or flammable material;
- Kitty Litter;
- Aquarium gravel;
- Strong Chemicals or toxic, caustic or poisonous substances;
- Degreasing solvents;
- Diapers, feminine products, or cloth of any kind;
- Fuel or lubricating oil, paint thinner or antifreeze;
- Plastic objects; and
- Seafood Shells.
- Sump pumps, rain gutters, downspouts, foundation drains, or any other type of rain water or groundwater.

These items can damage the grinder pump and its controls, cause blockages and backups, and create unsafe conditions in your sewer lines and grinder pump station. These items may overload the system and cause slower pumping rates, potentially resulting in sewage back-ups and overflows.

17. How do I properly maintain my grinder pump?

Please follow the manufacturer's recommended maintenance guidelines. Please refer to the Environment One packet on the Authority's website (<http://westcocalicotownship.com/>) for additional information.

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18. What should I do with my grinder pump when I go on vacation?

If you plan on being away for several days, replace the wastewater in the tank with clean water to help minimize odors. To do this, run an inside faucet for about 10 minutes – long enough for the grinder pump to start working (you may need to go outside near the pump and listen to verify it has started). After the pump starts, turn the inside faucet off. The pump will run until the tank is empty and shut off automatically. This process will cleanse the pump and keep it filled with a minimum amount of clean water. Remember to always leave the power to the pump on.

19. How do I connect to the sewer system?

The Authority will provide a stub at the right-of-way line for each property that is required to connect. After you have paid all applicable fees, your contractor will then install a gravity sewer lateral or grinder pump system and low pressure lateral, depending on your situation.

20. Where will gravity lateral stubs be placed?

Unless existing conditions dictate otherwise, the lateral stubs will be located at the right-of-way or easement boundary, offset ten (10) feet from the building, on the side with the lowest sewer main elevation. The lateral stub will also be installed ten (10) feet or greater from the assumed side property boundary unless the property pin can be located or set by the property owner.

21. What if I want to have the lateral on a different side of the house?

The lateral stub will be provided on the downstream side of your house. If you would like your sewer lateral stub to be on another side of the house, present your proposal to the Authority as soon as possible. The Authority will review your proposal and advise if the proposal is acceptable. The Authority will try to work with you. Still, the proposal must benefit both the homeowner and Authority and have technical merits.

22. Will I be required to replace my existing sanitary pipe?

The property owner will be required to replace existing terra cotta, cast iron, and defective PVC sanitary pipes between the building and the connection point.

23. To which floor of my house will the Authority provide sewer service?

The Authority will provide sewer service to the first floor elevation. For properties to be served by gravity sewer extensions, if the property has an existing toilet in a basement and it is the only toilet in the house, the Authority will provide a standard grinder pump. The property owner will still be responsible for installing the grinder pump, extra height, and low-pressure lateral similar to properties to be served by low-pressure sewer extensions.

24. Do all laterals have to be constructed to the Authority's standards?

Yes. The Authority's standards are posted on the Township's website.

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25. After being installed, must the laterals be inspected by the Authority?

Yes. An employee of the Authority or its agent will inspect the lateral after installation. No backfill shall be placed over the installed lateral until after it has been inspected and approved.

26. Will the Authority provide the grinder pump?

For properties to be served by low-pressure sewer extensions, the Authority will purchase a standard grinder pump and associated accessories for installation by each property owner's plumber. The same is true for properties that have an existing toilet in a basement and it is the only toilet in the house. A waiver or agreement will be used to convey ownership of the grinder pump and accessories from the Authority to the property owner. The property owner will be responsible for installing the grinder pump and low pressure lateral to the provided curb stop valve following the Authority's standards.

27. What if my sewer is deep? Will the Authority purchase a deeper grinder pump for me?

The property owner will be responsible for any extra height rings or similar products.

28. What if I have more than one dwelling unit in the same building?

If the units could be subdivided or sold separately, each unit must have its own sewer lateral, and if required, its own grinder pump. If the units are attached and cannot be sold separately, a common sewer lateral and grinder pump are allowed. In this case, a larger grinder pump station will be provided to accommodate the additional units.

29. What surveys should I expect on my property?

A bog turtle habitat survey will be conducted. Wetlands will be flagged within 100 feet of any watercourse or wetland crossing. Wetlands and bog turtle habitat will be identified within 300 feet of the project area.

A topographic field survey will also be conducted. The field survey will capture manhole inverts, culvert dimensions, first floor elevations of houses, and other features not capable of being captured by drone.

Just prior to construction, a lateral placement survey will be performed to confirm the appropriate location of the sewer lateral stub.

Entry onto private property will be required for all surveys.

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30. What construction should I expect on my property?

Most construction will be in the street or along the street in the public right-of-way. A lateral stub will be installed on your property within the public right-of-way. If the sewer main or lateral stub needs to be installed beyond the right-of-way, we will first obtain an easement from the property owner.

Your contractor will install a sewer lateral from the house to the lateral stub. The contractor installing the sewer lateral should stay within a 15' wide area with its trucks and spoils for the lateral stub. The trench for the lateral will typically be 4' wide and 6' deep. The trench and area disturbed by the Authority's contractor will be restored with topsoil and grass. You should also direct your contractor to restore the areas in your yard where your contractor works.

31. What is the timeline of the sewer extensions?

Barring any delays, field survey will be conducted between January 2021 and March 2021. Construction of the sewer mains is anticipated between July 2022 and March 2023, and connections will be required within 90 days after the sewer main is constructed. The above dates are tentative and are subject to change.

32. What if my septic system has failed or is failing? What should I do?

You should get in touch with the Township's Sewage Enforcement Officer (SEO) to determine the best course of action. The Township's SEO is aware of the areas where public sewer is planned and will advise on remediating your existing septic system before the public sewer is installed.