

Board Byline — Investing in the long-term sustainability of your community

By Susan Keil, Board Chair

Investments in local infrastructure support the health, sustainability, and prosperity of our community. Oak Lodge Water Services (OLWS) is taking steps to update its aging wastewater collections system and wastewater treatment plant to continue to provide you with safe and reliable service today and for years to come.

Currently, the OLWS wastewater treatment plant cleans an average of 1.5 billion gallons of wastewater annually to promote community health and wellbeing. Some sites in the OLWS collections system have become vulnerable to *inflow and infiltration*. This is when surface and ground water enter the collections pipeline system, particularly during strong storm events. The additional water causes added pressure on the collections pipeline system, the pumping stations, and the treatment system, occasionally leading to sanitary sewer overflows, for which OLWS can be fined by the Department of Environmental Quality.

Additionally, the existing wastewater treatment plant cannot reliably meet updated discharge requirements to the Willamette River that have been set by the Department of Environmental Quality, resulting in potential fines and reduced water quality. Construction of a tertiary treatment facility is needed to treat wastewater to a higher degree and meet necessary requirements.

Proactively investing in upgrades to our aging infrastructure today will help us avoid larger and more costly repairs in the future. Upgrades are planned over the next 5-to-10-years based on their urgency and benefit to the system. Addressing the system vulnerabilities identified now will position OLWS to handle stronger storm events caused by a shifting climate, meet future, more stringent regulations, reduce the risk of future sanitary sewer overflows, and promote healthy local waterways.

What does this mean for my rates? The OLWS Budget Committee will meet weekly April through May to discuss the budget for the coming year, which begins July 1, 2023. The Budget Committee is a group of volunteers who are also OLWS customers. The OLWS Board of Directors will meet on May 16, 2023 to adopt the budget with a proposed rate. The Public Hearing for the proposed rate will take place on June 20, 2023. This process will determine what rate increase will be required in the upcoming fiscal year to support the important capital improvements outlined above.

Learn more! This is a large and important community investment; OLWS values your input. Below are Board meetings where you can provide public comment about the planned improvements to the wastewater treatment plant and collections system. You're welcome to attend through Zoom video conference or in-person (14496 SE River Road Oak Grove, OR 97267). The upcoming regular meetings will be held at 6:00 p.m. on:

Tuesday, March 21 | Tuesday, April 18 | Tuesday, May 16

You can find more details about meeting locations and times at OakLodgeWaterServices.org. The OLWS Wastewater Master Plan offers a technical description of the needed capital improvements projects; you can view that at OakLodgeWaterServices.org.

Scan Me! Have you seen our yard signs around town at construction sites? When you do, scan the QR code on them with your smart phone now and in the future, and you'll be directed to a page where you can learn more about the projects OLWS is leading to invest in your public infrastructure.

Spring Rains Bring Growing Gardens

As we wish farewell to winter and prepare our gardens for spring it is important to remember that our actions impact the health of our watershed. A few small changes on your part make a big difference.

Here are five easy tips to help protect our water environment:

- Always pick up after your pets and dispose of pet waste in the garbage can. This keeps harmful bacteria out of local ditches and creeks, which is upstream from another community's water source.
- Use mechanical methods to remove weeds rather than chemicals. Once weeds are removed, add cornmeal to the soil to act as a natural pre-emergent.
- Compost kitchen scraps, grass clippings and yard debris then add it to your soil. Compost is rich in nutrients that plants need. Using compost minimizes the need for additional fertilizers.
- Remove debris from drainage ways and catch basins. Never put clippings down the catch basins—nutrients from greens can harm water quality.
- When selecting plants to include in your garden, choose native plants that are best suited for the conditions you have. Natives require less water and fertilizer.
- When planning a landscaping project near a creek, be sure to contact OLWS. Staff will help you determine if you need an erosion control permit and provide direction on preparing an erosion control plan. Erosion increases turbidity in streams, which affects water quality and aquatic life. Erosion can be avoided with simple measures on your part.

Small steps make a big difference. Remember, a healthy watershed begins with you!

Backflow Testing Information

For the health and safety of your family and our community — test your backflow this spring. **Please note, not everyone has or needs a backflow device.** Some reasons why you may need a backflow device include irrigation systems, swimming pools, hot tubs, boiler systems, or being on a well.

The Oregon Health Authority and OLWS requires annual backflow testing to maintain clean and safe drinking water. For your convenience OLWS has a Backflow Prevention Assembly Testing Program, you now may choose to have OLWS take care of the testing and repair work of your backflow prevention assembly(s). OLWS has contracted with a certified backflow tester to automatically perform this test annually at a reduced cost.

Backflow devices protect your home's potable plumbing system by blocking pollutants from entering your drinking water. Pollutants from the outdoor system can include pet waste, pesticides, herbicides, and fertilizers. For more information visit the Backflow Testing webpage or contact Dave Seifert at dave@olwsd.org or call (503) 353-4230.

Storm drain Cleaning Assistance Program (SCAP)

OLWS coordinates this discount program to assist area businesses. Storm drains require regular cleaning to remove pollutants and prevent flooding. The discounted flat fee of \$60 covers removal of debris from standard parking lot drains. Registration is open March 1- April 30 at OakLodgeWaterServices.org/SCAP

Emergency Contact Information

Our team is available 24 hours a day at (503) 654-7765. If you see water gushing up out of either the street, ground, or from a manhole, please call us. Use the same number if you notice sewer spills or if you see someone illegally dumping into a storm drain.



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