



City Reaches Settlement with Federal, State Governments Over Wastewater System FAQ

What is a consent decree?

A consent decree is a legally binding document between two parties that have agreed to resolve the issues raised in the Complaint (or lawsuit). The Consent Decree sets out how those issues have been resolved or will be mitigated moving forward.

What is an SSO and why is it bad?

SSOs are sanitary sewer overflows, and they are a by-product of an aging infrastructure. When sewer infrastructure ages, leaks in pipes can occur, allowing for stormwater to infiltrate the sewer system. Failures occur during heavy rain events when there isn't enough capacity in the system for the high volume of both stormwater and wastewater.

These failures result in SSOs, and they pose a potential threat to public health, the environment and the economic vitality of a city. The occurrence of an SSO is a direct violation of the Clean Water Act, and are required to be reported to the regulatory agencies.

What is wastewater?

Wastewater is an water source that has been used by humans. It comes from ordinary living processes: bathing, toilet flushing, laundry, dishwashing, etc. - from residential and domestic sources.

What is stormwater?

Stormwater is surface water in abnormal quantity resulting from heavy falls of rain or snow.

How long has the issue of unreported SSOs been going on?

In the fall of 2017, the City self-reported that there were approximately 900 unreported SSOs between January 1, 2012 and September 30, 2016.

In total, what is it going to cost?

The projected cost of compliance with the consent decree is \$45 million, and it is spread across 16 years. That equates to approximately \$3 million per year, which is on average for what has been spent on infrastructure upgrades.

Additional penalties associated with this consent decree include one lump sum of \$165,000 for the City's initial violation of the Clean Water Act. It is also coupled with the City's performance of a Supplemental Environmental Project (SEP), expending at least \$220,800 within 48 months following the effective date of the decree.

How will it be paid for?

Water and sewer projects are funded through a dedicated budget source which stems from residential and commercial water and sewer utility collections. They are also paid for by bonds and legislative dollars that are earmarked specifically for infrastructure.

Will my water and sewer rates increase?

The last rate increase for water and sewer occurred in the fall of 2019 and was from a set schedule of increases over a period of time approved by the former council and administration.

This year, the Hattiesburg City Council did not renew a schedule of rate increases over a period of time.

Rates may increase over time through standard costs of living adjustments and market inflation, but that will not be recommended this year.

What types of sewer upgrades will I see as a resident?

Aggressive rehabilitation and remediation of the sewer system comes by way of tv-ing lines (using a camera to see where abnormalities and failures are occurring), lining sewer lines that can be fixed without replacement and complete replacement.

In the coming years, the next major projects to occur include:

- Longleaf North
 - West 7th Street
 - West 6th Street
 - West 5th Street
 - Melba Avenue
 - Oliver Avenue
 - Gay Avenue
 - Short Columbia Street
- MLK Drive
 - May Avenue
 - Frances Street
 - Eastside Avenue
 - East Florence Street
 - Townsend Street
- District at Midtown

Why do sewer projects take so long?

After sewer lines are replaced, the ground needs 3-6 months of settling time before it can be paved. This adds to the lifespan of the paved road once the project is complete.