



PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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**Frequently Asked Questions:
June 26, 2018 Adopted Amendments to the
City of Santa Cruz Sanitary Sewer Ordinance**

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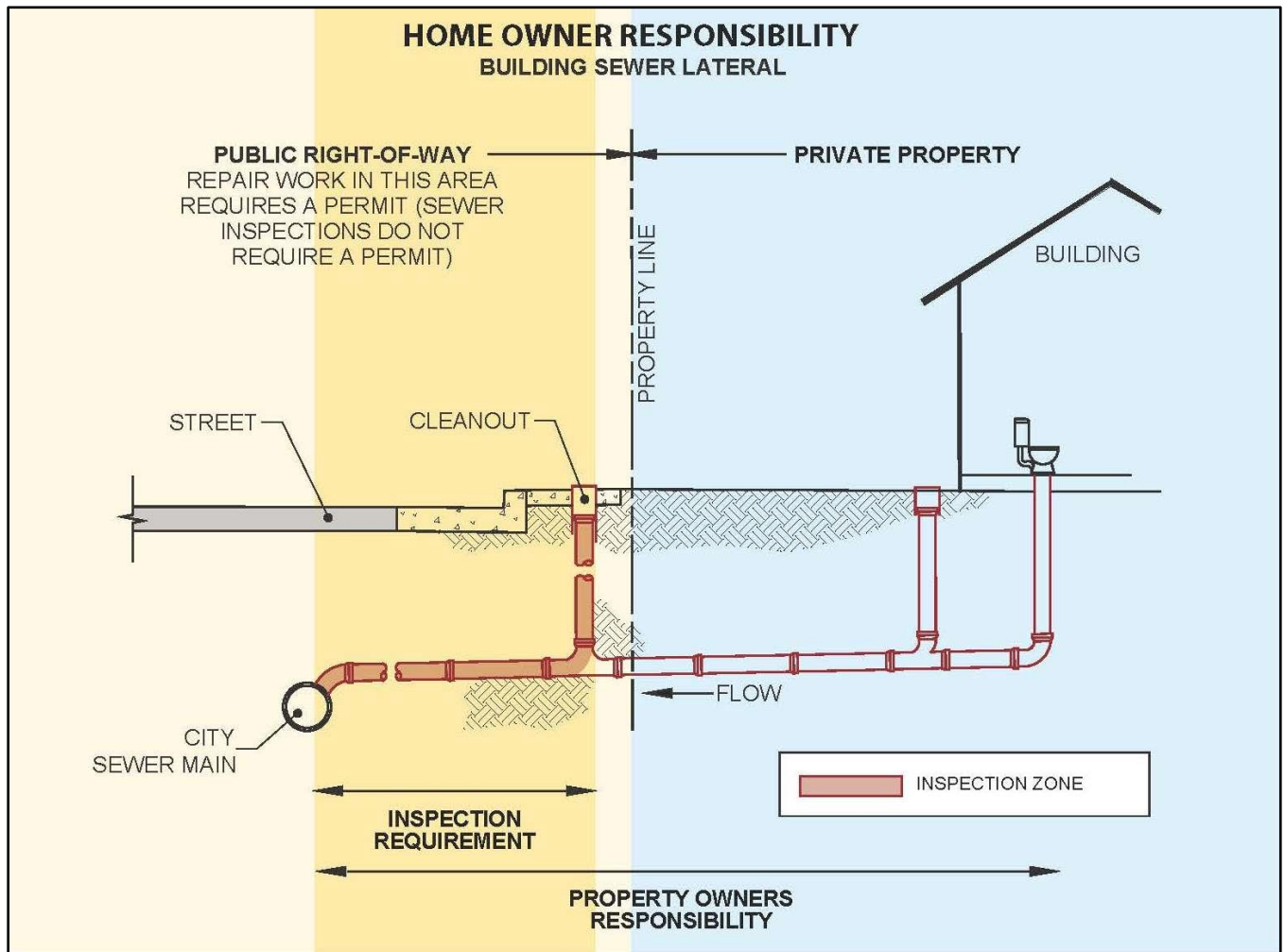
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More information is also available at www.cityofsantacruz.com/sewersystem

I. General Questions

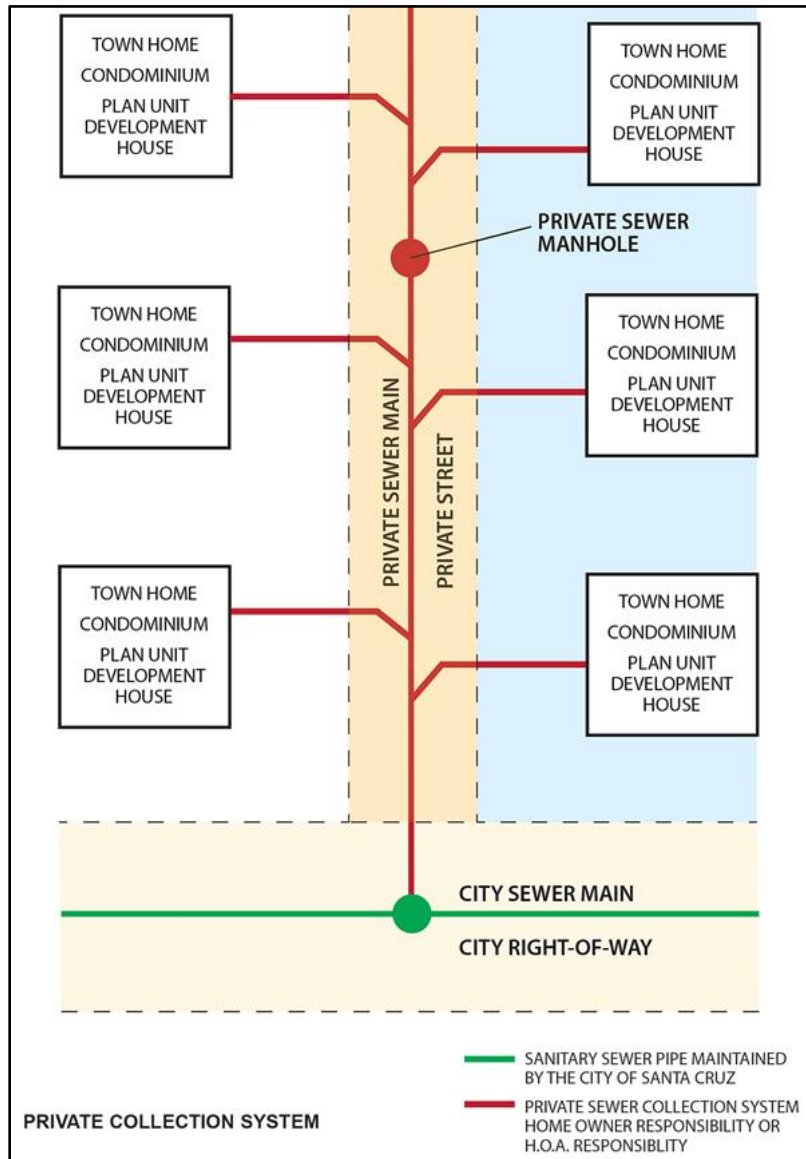
1. What is a lateral?

- Laterals, also known as building sanitary sewers, are the sewer pipes that carry wastewater from toilets, sinks and drains and connect from the house or building to the City's public sewer pipelines.
- They are typically made of 4" diameter clay or plastic pipe.



2. What is a private sanitary sewer collection system?

- Private sanitary sewer collection systems are any sanitary sewer pipe networks located on private property which connect more than one building's sanitary sewer before discharging into a City sewer main. Private systems are not owned or maintained by the City.
- Private systems would likely be found in apartment buildings, business complexes, mobile home parks, condominiums, and townhomes.



3. What has been amended in the City of Santa Cruz Sanitary Sewer Ordinance?

- The primary change to the ordinance is that the City now requires that laterals are inspected when triggered by activities such as a sewer overflow or the sale of

a property. Private sewer systems are now required to be cleaned and inspected on a regular schedule.

- The requirements fall under three categories:
 - i. Lateral Inspection Prior to Sale of Property
 - ii. Sanitary Sewer Overflow Response
 - iii. Inspections of Private Sanitary Sewer Collection Systems and Private Sanitary Sewer Lift Stations and Ejector Pumps
4. Why did the City of Santa Cruz amend the Sanitary Sewer Ordinance?
- To meet California state requirements for protection of the environment.
 - i. To reduce bacteria loading of groundwater, local waterways, the San Lorenzo River and Monterey Bay.
 - ii. To minimize lateral spills.
5. What happens if sanitary sewer pipes are not cleaned or inspected?
- As pipes age, they can develop leaks, become clogged by fats, oils and grease, and become cracked by roots. Cracked and damaged pipelines can cause sewer spills and backups which damage property and threaten public health and the environment. These defects often go unnoticed until they increase with signs of backup or failure. Defective pipelines affect us all. The City of Santa Cruz documents dozens of lateral spills each year.
6. What does the [City-certified plumber](#) inspection consist of?
- The City-certified plumber will perform a closed-circuit TV inspection of the sanitary sewer lateral, typically from the clean-out in the sidewalk down to the connection to the sewer main in the street.
 - The City-certified plumber will complete a standardized City of Santa Cruz Sewer Inspection Form that must be filed with the City.
7. What is required to pass inspection?
- The lateral must be shown to be in acceptable condition based on the number and severity of structural or operational defects, as determined by the City's sewer grading criteria. The criteria for passing an inspection resulting from a sewage spill are stricter than the criteria for passing an inspection resulting from sale of property. For more detail on grading criteria, please see the City's Grading Summary Paper.
 - Other requirements for passing inspection:
 - There must be a clean-out in the sidewalk area
 - There cannot be a P-trap in the line

8. Are there ever times when a video inspection cannot be completed and what happens then?
- If there is no accessible clean-out or other means of access then a clean-out will need to be installed prior to inspection.
 - For a lateral with serious structural or operational defects, it may not be possible for an inspection to be completed until those defects are corrected.
 - **Cost:** A new cleanout ranges from \$2,000 to \$4,000 plus inspection cost of \$300 to \$500 per lateral. Fixing serious structural or operation defects can vary widely in cost, with a full lateral replacement including new clean-out costing on average between \$10,000 - \$15,000.
9. Why isn't the City covering the cost of lateral repair?
- Throughout California, laterals have typically been the responsibility of the property owner. The sewage conveyed by the lateral is solely generated by the occupants of the property and can legally only serve one property parcel. Therefore, it is not for the public benefit, thus the City does not maintain or repair any portion of private laterals at the expense of the City's ratepayers. In most jurisdictions the private property owner is responsible for the sewer lateral. This includes the County of Santa Cruz Sanitation District, Watsonville, Scotts Valley, Berkeley, Oakland, Los Angeles and San Diego. San Jose is responsible for the maintenance of the sewer lateral located with the street. This is the exception not the norm.
10. When are do the amendments go into effect?
- a. The new spill procedures will be implemented on Aug. 1, 2018.
 - b. The private sewer system and pump requirements begin on Jan. 1, 2019.
 - c. The lateral inspection upon sale of property requirements begin on July 1, 2019.

II. Questions Related to the Sale of Real Property

(Effective July 1, 2019)

11. Which part of the ordinance affects the process for the sale of real property?
 - The Lateral Inspection Prior to Sale of Property.

12. What is the purpose of Lateral Inspection Prior to Sale of Property?
 - This will target and minimize subsurface leakage of sewage from private laterals into ground water and nearby storm drain lines. This will minimize line blockages which can cause spills on streets and sidewalks, and ultimately harm the storm drain system.
 - This also benefits the buyer as they will be aware of the condition of the lateral and won't unknowingly purchase a property with an existing sewer lateral issue and potentially expensive repairs needed.

13. Are there any exemptions to the required lateral inspection upon sale of property?
 - Yes, if the sewer lateral was constructed or replaced after 2010 and within 20 years or less prior to sale date, no inspection is required.
 - Yes, if the property passed sewer lateral inspection in the past 5 years, no inspection is required.

14. What if an individual unit within a multi-unit property with a private sanitary sewer system is being sold?
 - The Lateral Inspection Prior to Sale of Property only effects properties with a lateral that connects directly from the building to the City-owned sewer main (i.e. the lateral does not connect to a private sewer system).

15. What are property sellers' and buyers' responsibilities?

- The seller must have the property's sewer lateral video inspected by a [City-certified plumber](#).
- If the initial inspection shows the lateral is in *acceptable* condition and passes inspection, the seller will submit the completed inspection form to the City and will receive a Sanitary Sewer Inspection Certificate for Sale of Property before the conclusion of the sale of the property. The seller is responsible for providing the buyer with a copy of the completed inspection form and a copy of the sewer lateral inspection video.
- If the initial inspection shows the lateral is in *unacceptable* condition and fails the inspection, the seller must:
 - a. Have the sanitary sewer line repaired to bring it up to City standards (must be re-inspected to show that it is indeed in acceptable condition after the completed repairs). Or,
 - b. Complete a Transfer of Responsibility to Repair form with the buyer which transfers the responsibility of repair to the buyer in the terms of the property sale. The buyer would then have 90 days after the date of the sale to have the repairs completed and submit an inspection form showing the sewer lateral is in acceptable condition.
- Note: In order to pass inspection the lateral must have a clean-out installed in the sidewalk area and cannot have a P-trap. If an inspector is able to complete an inspection despite either of those conditions and the rest of the lateral is shown to be in acceptable condition, the inspection will still be considered failed until the clean-out is installed and/or P-trap is removed.

16. How to prevent an inspection from holding up the real estate escrow process?

- Seller should conduct inspection when—or prior to—listing. Seller must complete inspection prior to sale.
- Inspection can inform the negotiation.
- If agreed upon by both parties, they may use the option to transfer responsibility for repairs from seller to buyer. With transfer from seller to buyer, inspection and any needed repairs must be completed within 90 days of the sale of property.

III. Questions Related to the Sanitary Sewer Overflow Response

(Effective August 1, 2018)

17. What does the Sewer Spills Overflow Response amendment change?

- When the City responds to sewer spill at a property they will issue a Notice of Violation which starts a 14-day clock in which time the property owner must have their sewer lateral inspected and must have any necessary repairs completed.
- If a passing inspection showing the sewer lateral to be in acceptable condition is not submitted within 14 days of the serving of the Notice of Violation, the City may issue fines and take other legal measures to ensure that the issue is fixed and sewage spill do not continue to occur.

IV. Questions Related to the Inspections of Private Sanitary Sewer Collection Systems and Private Sanitary Sewer Lift Stations and Ejector Pumps

(Effective January 1, 2019)

18. What does the Inspections of Private Sanitary Sewer Collection Systems and Private Sanitary Sewer Lift Stations and Ejector Pumps change?

- This amendment requires that private sanitary sewer collection systems and pumps (at apartment buildings, homeowner associations and businesses) must pass inspection every 10 years. Their pipelines must be cleaned every two to five years depending on size. Privately-owned pump stations must pass inspection every one to five years depending on size.