

Information Item

Equity Advisory Committee



Meeting Date: May 16, 2023

Topic

Private Property Inflow and Infiltration Grant Program

District(s), Member(s): All
Policy/Legal Reference: Minn. Stat. § 471.342
Staff Prepared/Presented: Council Member Wendy Wulff
Division/Department: Wastewater Planning & Community Programs

Background

Inflow and infiltration (I/I) is clear water – stormwater and groundwater – that enters the wastewater system. It overloads the system and can cause costly sewer backups into homes and buildings. I/I can also cause sewer overflows into rivers and lakes. Common sources are shown in Figure 1.

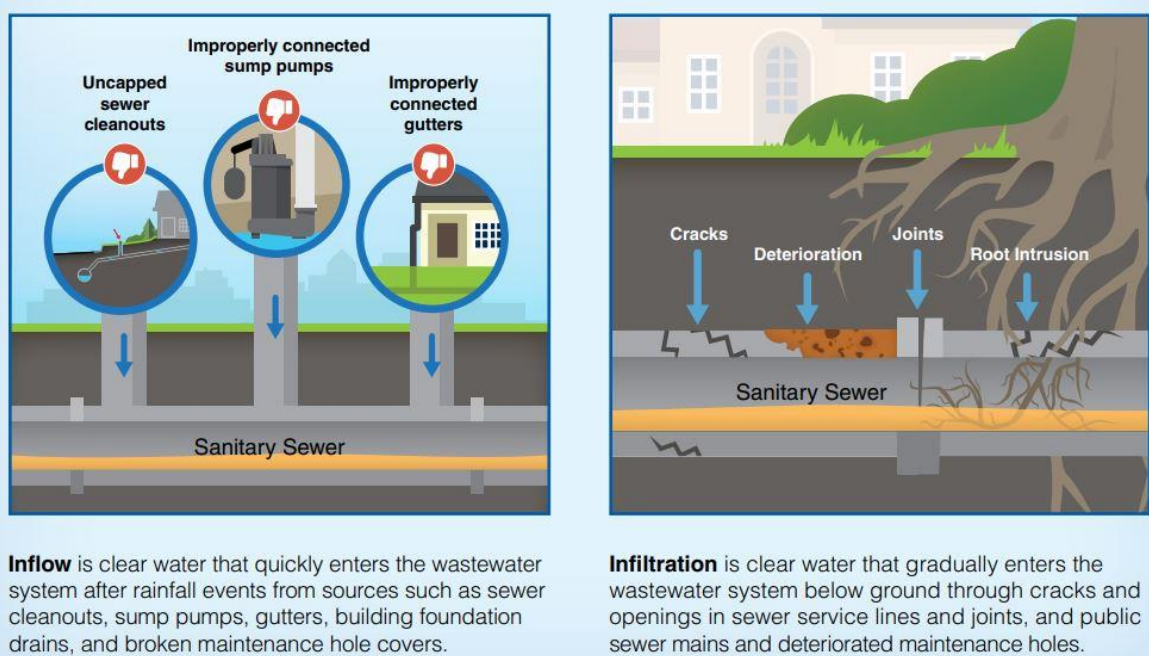


Figure 1: Sources of inflow and infiltration

Inflow & Infiltration Mitigation Efforts

Met Council and communities across the region have invested significant time and money into mitigation of public I/I sources. The Ongoing I/I Mitigation Program, which provides financial assistance to communities to reduce their I/I has been in place since 2004 with good success. From 2004 to 2020, communities invested over \$170 million in their public system and Met Council invested over \$100 million in the interceptor system. The efforts have been impactful, with the Met Council able to defer capacity improvements that are estimated at \$1 billion. Despite all the work, I/I is still present in the system, evident by flow exceedances during wet weather events.

Communities, in their Comprehensive Plans, also agree that I/I from private property is a major, untouched source. Local communities, through their 2040 Comprehensive Sewer Plan submittals, indicate that at least 50% of I/I comes from private property. In their plans, they also have identified a need for funding to promote I/I mitigation on private property sources. Recent estimates for a sewer lateral repair are \$8,000 or more, which can be costly to a homeowner.

2023 Private Property Inflow and Infiltration Task Force

Minnesota Statute § 471.342 was amended and signed into law by Governor Walz in April 2022 that allowed the Met Council and other political subdivisions of the state to “provide loans and grants to property owners to assist the owners in financing the cost of abating inflow and infiltration on their property” (Minn. Stat. § 471.342, subd. 3).” This came about after a recommendation from a previous I/I task force to find a consistent funding source to assist with private property I/I mitigation.

The 2023 Private Property Inflow & Infiltration task force met four times in 2023 to design a grant program to use Met Council funds to provide financial assistance to property owners to mitigate private property I/I. The membership consisted of previous task force members to capitalize on their experience and knowledge, public works directors, finance professionals, engineering staff, city administrators, and representation from the Association of Metropolitan Municipalities. The task force represented the range of physical locations and municipality sizes across the metro area. The task force was chaired by Metropolitan Council Member Wendy Wulff.

Grant Program Development

From the change in statute, the Met Council can now use revenue to provide grants to property owners. The source of money for those grants will come from Environmental Services’ user fees. Every home, business and industry that does not use an individual septic system is connected to the regional wastewater conveyance and treatment system and pays user fees. No federal or state tax money is involved.

After meeting in spring 2023, the task force proposed specific mitigation strategies eligible for grant reimbursement with reimbursement recommended to be 50% of eligible costs, up to \$5,000. This increase in funding amount results from the increase in prices for repairs.

To further live into the goals in Thrive MSP 2040, there was a specific goal set for the task force to include a component of equity in the program. The task force discussed many options and recommended the Met Council allow participating municipalities the flexibility to determine how to implement equity in their community. The task force community representatives provided diverse examples of how the need in their community is different than other communities, so a one-size-fits-all approach may not allow funding to be given to those in most need.

Next Steps

Met Council staff are drafting the task force report and procedure manual for the grant program. After completion, the task force report and grant program procedure manual will be presented to the Environment Committee, Metropolitan Council, and go through a public review period before being approved. The goal is for funding to be available in 2024.

For more information:

- Metropolitan Council I/I Program: <https://metro council.org/Wastewater-Water/Planning/Wastewater/Inflow-and-Infiltration.aspx>
- Environmental Services Funding and Finance: <https://metro council.org/Wastewater-Water/Funding-Finance.aspx>
- Amended Statute: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/statutes/cite/471.342>

