Agenda - Council - July 27, 2005

Report - Standing Policy Committee on Public Works - July 12, 2005

Item No. 2 Reporting the operation of pumping stations to the public
File WS-9

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 20, 2005, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works and submits the following to Council:

1. That the June 29, 2005 Council Motion be filed, inasmuch as the Water and Waste Department will make modifications to reporting the operation of pumping stations on its website and through other means of communication with the public and that the changes will be made before the end of the summer 2005.

2. That the Proper Officers of the City be authorized to do all things necessary to implement the intent of the foregoing.

Report - Standing Policy Committee on Public Works - July 12, 2005

DECISION MAKING HISTORY:

EXECUTIVE POLICY COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 20, 2005, the Executive Policy Committee concurred in the recommendation of the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works and submitted the matter to Council.

STANDING COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION:

On July 12, 2005, the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works recommended that the June 29, 2005 Council Motion be filed, inasmuch as the Water and Waste Department will make modifications to reporting the operation of pumping stations on its website and through other means of communication with the public and that the changes will be made before the end of the summer 2005.

On July 12, 2005, Councillor Benham, River Heights-Fort Garry Ward, submitted a document with respect to sewer flow information system.

COUNCIL:

On June 29, 2005, Council ruled automatic referral of the following motion to the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works:

Moved by Councillor Benham,
Seconded by Councillor Gerbasi,

WHEREAS the Clean Environment Commission recommended the City of Winnipeg notify the public of combined sewer overflows on a timely basis;

AND WHEREAS the Water and Waste Department has stated it wishes to comply with the recommendation;

AND WHEREAS high water levels have rendered accurate measurements difficult, as stated on the Department's website;

AND WHEREAS the operation of the City's pumping stations is a reliable indicator or a combined sewer overflow;

AND WHEREAS the Department's website does not currently state when pumping stations have been engaged;

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DECISION MAKING HISTORY (Continued):

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Standing Policy Committee on Public Works request the Department to investigate the feasibility of detailed timely reporting of the operation of pumping stations on its website and through other means of communication with the public.

This system indicates the current condition of our entire sewer network with regard to sewer overflows into the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. It is based on a reading of high water sensors in the sewer pipes, along with other indicators such as river levels.

Launched in 2004, this system will operate each year during the wet weather season – May to the end of September. The earliest we can reactivate it is when high spring river levels drop to normal summer levels - around 7 feet .

This information system is not active right now because continue to be high. Operating the system with high river levels would give inaccurate readings. We don't expect river levels to return to normal until late July.

Under dry weather conditions, it is highly unlikely that sewer overflows will occur. However, under moderate to heavy rainfall conditions, overflows from the combined sewer system are likely.

We are working to improve this system so that it can operate throughout the wet weather season regardless of river levels.

Where do sewer overflows occur?
Most of the overflows occur in the combined sewer system of our . Combined sewers are pipes that carry both wastewater (sewage from homes and businesses) and land drainage. There are about 1,034 kilometres of combined sewers. Typically, they serve areas of the city built before the 1960s.

When do combined sewers overflow?
Combined sewers carry all of the wastewater flow to the wastewater treatment plants during dry weather conditions. In fact, they can carry up to 2.75 times the normal dry weather flow. However, during rainstorms they cannot handle all of the runoff that enters the sewer system. Most of the rain/wastewater mixture flows to the treatment plants, but some of the diluted wastewater overflows to the river system.

How often do sewer overflows occur?
Our annual average is 18 overflows during the recreation season (May 1 to September 30).

Are combined sewers unique to Winnipeg?
No. Many North American cities, including several others in Manitoba, have similar wastewater systems. Hundreds of communities built combined sewers because they were a cost-effective way to provide sewer service and improve drainage. Combined sewers in our city date from 1880. They were the first sewer infrastructure.

Sometimes I see garbage floating in the rivers? Is this from a sewer overflow?
There are floating debris in the rivers when an overflow occurs. However, most of the time, the material has been washed into sewers from the streets during a rainstorm. Residents can help reduce floating debris by keeping their yards clean and not putting

What are you doing to reduce sewer overflows?
We could be investing up to $392 million over the next 25 years to reduce the number of combined sewer overflows from our current average of 18 to a target of 4 during the recreation season (May 1 to September 30). We will modify the system to allow us to store the sewage until it can be pumped to the treatment plants. We could also spend an additional $359 million on other wastewater system (pdf - 364kb), such as reducing nutrients in effluent, and disinfecting effluent.