

Getting Deltawood hooked to the system

By [James Mayer, The Oregonian](#)

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Motoya Nakamura/The Oregonian/2004

The common area in Deltawood, built as temporary housing during World War II, now serves as backyards for several homes. In the tiny Northeast neighborhood of Deltawood, water runs down the street when it isn't raining and sewage flows out of manholes in backyards. All 41 homes are on the same water meter, and as a result of leaks and unpaid accounts, the bill at one point exceeded \$100,000.

The city will install new water and sewer lines to the homes next year, at an average cost of \$18,990.52 per home.

"We can't afford it, but we can't afford not to, either," resident Neal Ruckman told the City Council before it approved two local improvement districts in February. "It's just that critical."

The small neighborhood has long been largely ignored by the rest of Portland, but the improvement district may be one step toward ending the isolation.

The project takes advantage of the city's "party" sewer program, which offers a subsidy by capping the cost of converting privately owned sewer lines like Deltawood's to the public system. In the Deltawood case, the subsidy is worth about \$9,900 per home.

The city estimates that 10,000 to 12,000 properties may be served by party sewers.

"There are definitely little private systems out there," said Matt Hickey project manager for the



Bureau of Environmental Services. Beth Nakamura/The Oregonian Deltawood, a neighborhood of 41 houses tucked into a Northeast Portland industrial area, is served by private water and sewer systems on a single meter. A local improvement district has been formed to connect the homes to the city system, which most residents support as a needed but expensive project. Several homes in the neighborhood are in foreclosure and for sale.

The City Council adopted a requirement in January 2008 that properties connected to a party sewer hook up to the public sewer if it is available. Party sewers can cause conflicts because they often require easements across neighboring properties.

Earlier this year, the City Council approved a local improvement district to replace a private sewer system serving 29 lots in the Royal Highlands neighborhood of Northwest Portland.

In Deltawood, the neighborhood largely supports the sewer project, but one resident objected on the grounds that it was too expensive, and another is mounting a more public fight. Kay Williford fears that property owners will abandon their homes rather than pay.

"You're making a ghost town of the neighborhood," Williford said in an interview.

She has talked to Mayor Sam Adams and contacted the office of Commissioner Randy Leonard, who oversees the Water Bureau, about her concerns.

In a two-page response, Leonard detailed the city's extensive contact with neighborhood residents during the past two years, which included seven mailings, two meetings with city staff and two City Council hearings.

"While I cannot eliminate the cost of the water system improvements, I can assure you that these improvements will provide a real and tangible benefit for Deltawood property owners," he said.