



ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
CITY OF PORTLAND  
working for clean rivers

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Bureau of  
Development  
Services

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The bureaus of Environmental Services and Development Services are working together to address property issues involving party sewers. Answers to some frequently asked questions (FAQs) about party sewers are provided below.

### **What is a party sewer?**

A party sewer is a privately-owned sewer line shared by two or more properties. These lines commonly access the public sewer system through a private sewer line located in the public right-of-way or a private line crossing adjacent privately-owned properties. The city estimates that party sewers may serve 3,000 to 4,000 properties.

### **How do I know if I have a party sewer?**

Unfortunately, complete records of all party sewers do not exist. Party sewers are more common in areas of the city with older infrastructure. City plumbing and other records of sewer connection may provide some useful information. City plumbing records may be obtained from the Bureau of Development Services, Resource/Records located at 1900 SW 4th Avenue, Portland, OR 97201 or by reviewing records online at [www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/plumbing\\_permits](http://www.portlandoregon.gov/bds/plumbing_permits).

A video sewer line inspection may be necessary to verify whether a property is connected to a party sewer. A video sewer line inspection involves inserting a video camera attached to a flexible cable into the sewer line. The camera transmits video images of the inside of the line and a permanent recording can be made. A video sewer line inspection is also useful for assessing the condition of the sewer line. Private plumbing contractors or property inspection service companies typically conduct video sewer line inspections.

### **Do party sewers conform to current code requirements?**

No. The Uniform Plumbing Code requires each property to have an independent connection and legal route of access to the public sewer.

Additionally, Portland City Code (PCC) 17.33.050 requires abandonment of a non-conforming sanitary sewer connection within 180 days of the city providing notice to affected property owners that individual and direct sanitary sewer connections are available.

**Does a change in a home's ownership trigger a requirement to disconnect a party sewer?** No. A change in a home's ownership alone does not trigger a requirement to disconnect a party sewer. If, however, the city becomes aware of a party sewer through the inspection process of a real estate transaction or other means, the affected property owners will be notified and may be required to disconnect as described further below.

**Are existing party sewers allowed to remain in service?** Existing party sewers may be allowed to remain if a proper, legally recorded permanent private sewer easement and maintenance agreement

between the owners of the properties the party sewer serves was recorded before January 2, 2008. A property owner may lose use of a party sewer line if no such easements were recorded. Each property owner will then be required to connect separately to the public sewer. The other exception to existing party sewers remaining in service is through the future public sewer extension process described briefly below.

The city will not approve new party sewer lines or repair of existing party sewer lines when public sewer is considered immediately available. When no further extension of the public sewer is required to serve a property, property owners are required to build new branches from their homes to the existing public sewer main line or service lateral.

**What is the city doing about party sewers?**

Depending on the location in the city, property owners may be able to defer expenses for participating in a public sewer extension. If the city has determined that it will construct a new public sewer in the future, property owners may be allowed to replace the existing party sewer line by recording a temporary easement and maintenance agreement. This alternative approach requires that affected property owners agree on the terms of the temporary easement and maintenance agreements.

**What if I'm considering buying a property and I suspect it may be served by a party sewer?**

It is recommended that a video sewer line inspection of a property's sewer line be completed before executing a sale agreement. The video sewer line inspection will provide information on the condition and location of the sewer line and any necessary repairs, and confirm whether the property is connected to a party sewer line.

**What does it cost to disconnect a party sewer and construct a separate sewer connection?**

The cost of disconnecting a party sewer and constructing a new sewer connection depends on many factors specific to each property. Licensed plumbing contractors can provide cost estimates.

**Is there any financial assistance available through the city?**

The Bureau of Environmental Services offers financing for private plumbing costs and city sewer fees. Qualification for these loans is not based on income or credit history. The loans have a fixed interest rate, low set-up cost and monthly repayment schedules of 5, 10 and sometimes 20 years. There are no prepayment penalties for early payoff. The Safety Net Loan Program also offers low-interest loans with deferred payment options to owner occupants who meet low-income qualifications.

**Where can I get more information about party sewers?**

City staff are available to discuss possible resolutions available through existing rules and to assist you with the process. Please contact the BES Party Sewer Hotline at 503-823-7869 to discuss issues over the telephone or to schedule an appointment to meet at city offices or at a specific property. You may email questions or submit information to [nonconforming@portlandoregon.gov](mailto:nonconforming@portlandoregon.gov).