

Minutes for Streets & Sewers

August 21, 2018

Members present: Mr. Schaber, Mr. Huddle, Mr. Daniels. With a quorum present, Mr. Schaber called the meeting to order at 6:41 PM.

Mr. Huddle moved to approve the minutes of July 17, 2018; Mr. Daniels 2nd. Roll call: Ayes all, motion carried.

Minutes of 07/17/2018 were approved (3-0).

New Business:

Item 1. CHECK VALVE DISCUSSION

City Engineer Bischoff stated that administration has been in conversations with a concerned resident regarding installing check valves throughout the system to help protect home owners who face backups in their houses during wet weather events. A sample policy was provided from the city of Hamilton, OH. They have a check valve/backflow valve program. They reimburse a portion of cost to resident to pay for installation. They also talked to the Marion County Sanitary Engineer because they have over the years installed 20-25 backflow valve/check valves with residents who have encountered issues with back up in their basements during wet weather events.

This is a discussion of how to go about doing this, the purpose, and where it came from. They have some guidelines that are very useful. He has drafted a quick application that a resident would have to do. We would have to figure out how to qualify those residents that meet qualifications. We will need to figure out amount we are comfortable with for a partial reimbursement of a check valve installation. Some of the requirements would be that residents fall into designated areas that they know experience overflows and backups in the basements. They know this through the long-term control plan, along with annual sanitary sewer overflow reporting. They must report all water in basements. They encourage residents if they encounter backup to call waste water to report to EPA. That gives them a better handle on how our system reacts to events. They may want to possibly consider an income requirement or low-to-moderate income area of city that could be part of the eligibility requirement for cost sharing with the city. He can prepare a full packet when council is ready to visit to include application, release form, guidelines, and an ordinance whenever council is ready to see that.

Mayor Schertzer stated that the reason this is being brought forward is because a citizen suggested this as a possibility of something to look at as a proactive program. They have met a couple of times over this issue. They thought it was important to take a closer look at what other communities are doing. They are looking for feedback from council on something like this. Should they take the next step and what is that? Is it simply writing the policy? Is there an approval process that needs to go before city council? They would need to look at the budget for sanitary and storm water to see how much could go in a program like this. Once that money is gone for the calendar year, that money is gone. It would be on a first-come first-serve basis. They would rather work with an owner-occupied home. That does not mean that they would not consider other places, but they want to give preference to owner occupied home first.? There are many things to look at to qualify an individual home

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owner – are they current on city bills and taxes -- if they were to move forward with council's consent.

Deb Blevins (4th ward) asked if there is a possibility that people's homeowners insurance would pay for these as a preventative? Engineer Bischoff indicated that he did not know.

According to Engineer Bischoff, the county sanitary engineer reports that the typical cost is \$1,100-1,400. Every situation is different – depth of sewer, where it's going to be, sometimes you must move steps, porches, shrubbery, etc.

The discussion is who would pay and how much. Do they set a cap, i.e. they are willing to contribute x amount of dollars for the installation of the check valve (per property) and that is all they are going to pay. They are requesting input about where they want to set that.

Mr. Huddle asked if check valves can be used in two properties. Engineer Bischoff stated that a check valve simply stops backflow of water. It has a flap in it that closes with back pressure. Two properties should each have their own lateral. They should not be sharing a lateral. Each property should have its own check valve. It is really on the back pressure from the system not what is coming out.

Mayor Schertzer stated that it would be up to individual home owner to talk to their policy holder regarding insurance options. He believes that homeowners may be able to get a rider on the home owners insurance that will cover things like this. The city is not going to get engaged in that type of issue. It is up to homeowner to ensure that they have adequate insurance to prevent these types of things. They are not going to recommend a contractor. They want to stay out of that as well. It will be up to homeowner to go out and seek their own contractor to do the job and then that would have to fit within the parameters that they design if they move forward on a project like this.

Currently, property owners can install their own. The question tonight is if the city is going to take on a cost sharing program for check valves in certain geographic and demographic areas of our community. There are several check valves throughout the city that individual homeowners have installed.

Mr. Daniels stated that predominately sewage overflow backs up through the basement floor drain. If a homeowner shuts off the floor drain, they will not have the flooding problem. People do not want to shut off the floor drain. It is like they prefer a flooded basement instead of getting rid of the floor drain. Why would they continue to put up with a flooded basement, if 90% of the time it is the floor drain? There is a check valve that installs in the floor drain that costs about \$30. It is fiber glass with a sleeve. They screw in each floor drain. The home owner can still use the drain except it will not let flow surge backward. A homeowner would not have to tear up their yard and it would not cost \$1,100. He foresees that a program as discussed will result in contractors interested in installing a \$1,100-1,500 check valve and they will convince home owners that is the solution to their problem. This is not the most affordable option.

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Engineer Bischoff stated that the City of Hamilton's check valve installation program goes in the basement floor, right before the floor drain.

Ken Lengieza (City Planning Director) stated that he has dealt with a check valve in his own home. It is about 90% effective. If there is any little bit of play in the flap, eventually water will seep through. As his backup, he has eliminated the floor drains. He believes that the city would have to have a little bit more control with a list of approved contractors to prevent bad installations. Also, the valve has got to be able to be maintained. It needs to go in a spot where the homeowner can take it out and clean it out. If it is not maintained, the flap will not be able to close. Each situation is different. Mr. Daniel's solution would work just fine if that is all you have is a basement (vs. a split level). Other places you might need more. It should be carefully studied and do not just let anyone do this. The City could be opening up problems down the road.

Mr. Blevins (220 Blaine Avenue) stated that he discovered in 1971-1972 that when it rained, his basement filled up with about 31" of raw sewage with human waste floating around. He came up to city hall and complained and talked to different people. He could not get anywhere. He did not feel they were going to take care of anything like that. He talked to his neighbors and they said that they have been living with this for over 20 years. It happens several times a year (not every year). He was not going to live like that and no insurance will not take care of water lines, sewer lines, power lines, gas lines between the street and home. They will take care if the home owner has a rider for flood insurance with sewer back up. When they are making three-four claims a year, they are not going to support you in that anymore. People constantly having to replace hot water heaters, furnaces because of the sewer backing up into the basement. It is the city's problem. It is the city's fault because they have not taken care of the sewer lines needed as the city has expanded. It is on record that the city has known that that neighborhood has had this problem since the 1950s. Nothing is still done about it.

Mr. Blevins continued. About 8-10 years ago, he presented this check valve program to city council only. He had numerous meetings with administration. He is grateful to them for meeting with him over the years because this administration has lended an ear very much more so than previous administrations. He is grateful for that and that includes also the law director and city engineering department Mr. Bischoff. He became aware that check valves years ago did not work because they were made from metal. That is not going to work in a wet environment. Common sense tells him that. However, over the years, there has been manufacturers that have come up with plastic check valves. He purchased an ABS check valve because he was not going to live with that with having to clean up human waste on his basement floor that would be 2" thick after the water receded. He devised a plan where he raised his sewer above the flood stage within my house. It no longer goes underneath the basement floor so that would stop it. He put a lot of money and a lot of work to preventing it then. The horizontal pipe is about 4-7" above the floor. It used to never get wet, other than when something was being flushed out. Over the years in his neighborhood, it has gotten worse and that pipe fills up with sewer. He is within 3" of overflowing of the stand pipe. The washing machine in the basement drains into a pipe that is 66" above the floor. It is now within 3" of overflowing that when the city has these rain events. It will not be long, and he will have sewer in his basement again.

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He stated that the city of Columbus was sued over this same issue and they were court ordered to put in check valves. The same things were going to be handled in Hamilton and they decided to take care of it without the law suit being finished. Because again it is the city's issue. It is not the home owner's responsibility to fix this. It is the city's problem. His last proposal to administration was to give up to \$1,250 in credit to the homeowner. If it goes over that, the home owner must eat it. They should be current on all property taxes, current on all city utilities. He has photos to support his claims and to show his set up, as well as basements of neighbors showing flooding. He is not flooding now, but is within 3" of overflowing. He showed a check valve that the county puts in and that Hamilton puts in. There is another one that they install one inside the house, as well as outside the house. It is what Columbus is putting in. He had a miniature of that to show council. It is accessible outside the house. It is removable without having to dig up dirt. It does have to be maintained and the manufacturer suggests that it be pulled out and hosed down every three months and reinstalled. If it gets destroyed or damaged, it can be replaced because they are just replacing the flapper on it itself. Home owners are not having to dig up and replace everything else. Homeowners do have to pull it out before they run a snake down the house. It cannot hardly be installed backwards when homeowners do maintain it. His suggestion to the city is the homeowner must sign agreement that after installed it is their responsibility and they cannot go back on the city for anything. It is their responsibility to maintain it and clean it and keep it functional. The replacement flappers are very inexpensive, just a few dollars apiece. He also demonstrated a full-scale ABS unit that he bought for his house, but he is not going to install it until he gets reimbursed from the city. He has already gotten a lot of expense to stop it from coming in his house. This valve is not going to stick or break. Homeowners do have to maintain it and clean it. He does not want it inside his house. He has pictures to show what happens. If a home owner puts a plug in the pipe, it has nowhere to vent. They have got these old houses that have tile pipes underneath the basement floors. That pressure will push that up the floor, concrete and all. He has pictures where that has happened in the neighborhood. That is why it needs to be outside in the lateral before it comes in the house. This gives it a little bit of room to relieve pressure up in the stand pipe. This is the ultimate valve to prevent it from causing damage to the house. He is amazed that the city has not been sued for hot water heaters, damage, clean up, decrease in property values, etc.

Mr. Daniels stated that he has looked at Mr. Blevins system at his home. His is plastic all the way out past the foundation. He would say that Mr. Blevins should install that check value as it comes through the wall so that he can maintain it. He does not have the clay pipe problem under the floor with his house.

Mr. Blevins agreed, because he had already removed that pipe. If the check-valve happens to catch the homeowner right when they should be cleaning it, they could have a little bit of seepage. But by the time that seepage reaches up into there and by the time I'm able to get to it, that seepage is not going to be enough to flood his basement.

Mr. Daniels stated that Mr. Blevins should not wait for his basement to flood the next three inches before he installs that check valve because he wants the city to pay for it. That could be tomorrow or 20 years from now.

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Mr. Blevins stated that he is going to be dead and buried before the city ever does anything about his problem. He is losing patience. The last thing he wants to do is to sue the city. He would have done it a long time ago if that is what he wanted to do. That is the last thing he wants to do. He does not want to badmouth the city. He wants the city to help him work this out. He is aware that the city does not have millions of dollars to run a new sewer line between his house and the plant (which is what we need), but he would like for the city to at least give him this. Especially now with the new sewer rates that they are going to have to contend with. He is asking for the city to give him credit on the sewer bill until he is reimbursed (three years credit, approximately). Help him out that little bit. He stated that he could have it court ordered to hold it in escrow to take care of it too.

Mr. Daniels stated that does not make anyone especially warm to the argument, so he may want to avoid that type of conversation. Mr. Blevins has come here and stated that he is going to wait until it floods even though he has a check valve that he is refusing to install until the city pays him. The court is going to question that he wants the city to pay for his flooded basement when he set it up. Mr. Daniels stated that he is sympathetic to his situation, to some degree.

Mr. Schaber stated that this is a larger discussion that they can revisit. Mr. Bischoff said that he could put some stuff together if the committee requested him to do so. Mr. Schaber believes that they should talk and revisit this next month. And they can go from there.

Mr. Daniels stated that let say that they geographically set these areas up. They know what floods. They have an idea of whose basement floods. They go through the entire process of installing check valves in all those basements. They just created new problems. Water goes to other neighborhoods. Then they are resetting new geographical areas because now people's basements who have never flooded will come in and they say that was a generous thing you have done for people whose basements flooded and now ours does and we want to hold you liable for it.

Mr. Blevins stated that is exactly what happens. In my neighborhood where they have had this problem and it has gotten worse in the last 5 years because they have torn down several homes and large apartment buildings that have large basements. Now those basements are not there collecting that water and that is why it is worse for them now. So, whether they are putting in check valves or they are demolishing homes in the neighborhood, the same effect is the result.

Mr. Schaber stated that this is a long conversation. He believes that it needs to be set up properly because the last thing he wants to do is set up a program that could in turn cost the home owner a lot more money. An example may be a home sharing a lateral. By code, each property should have its own lateral. When they are trying to put in a check valve to prevent that and they find out that they are sharing the lateral, they may open a large expense of installing a new lateral. A lot of thought and discussion needs to go into deciding if the city wants to pick up that burden. They will call a committee meeting for the second meeting in September. That will give everyone plenty of time.

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Mr. Daniels said that he is not totally against the idea, but it just takes a lot of thought and consideration of the liability issue because of the creation of problems with other neighbors that are uphill. Water ends up going somewhere. That is an avenue that we need to check out. Maybe it is a certain specific credit and we do not come with the specific fix. I do not know what that remedy is.

Mr. Daniels clarified that if there is a check valve put into one area, it can move the water to neighbor's areas that are lower. Although people come out of their houses to watch and cheer for every abandoned house that the city or the land bank takes down, that is a whole lot of storage capacity that is filled up and it is not used. Even the city would require you to cap the sewer at that point so that water cannot travel back to the sewer and even fill the aggregate bed that they left in the basement. That water ends up somewhere.

Engineer Bischoff explained that part of the qualifications that they would look at with the committee is how they determine the areas. They have the areas based out of their studies that show surface flooding or the sewers coming back out of the ground. We have our annual reports. Their report for the year 2016 showed that they had 122 "water in the basement" calls. They send the crew out figure out what is going on. 85 of those calls were for issues with the lateral itself. We had 4 calls (of the 122) that were for high water. There are areas that they know that have historically flooded – Blaine, Columbia, Windsor. It is a low corridor. However, their reports have shown a drastic drop in the numbers over the year. People may not be calling, however every time they talk to residents, they say request that they report so that they can identify problem areas.

With no further business to come before this committee, Mr. Schaber adjourned the meeting at 7:21pm.

Chairman Schaber

Clerk of Council