

DEC Consent Order and its impact on you

Written by Administrator

Friday, 06 May 2016 11:08 - Last Updated Monday, 06 June 2016 16:08

The Village recently entered into an Order of Consent with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This order requires the Village to undertake various tasks to address overflows in our sanitary sewer system.

The Village has been monitoring our system for years. This has included monitoring overflows at various locations, performing camera work to inspect the condition of our lines, and addressing sewer main breaks as they occur. Another way that the Village has addressed overflows is through the implementation of legislation requiring installation of sump pumps and bubblers (which must be inspected and certified before property can be transferred/sold). But the DEC is now requiring us, not only to monitor and maintain our lines, but to repair/replace them. We also are required to augment our monitoring.

As you might imagine, this costs money. New equipment has been purchased to provide better monitoring of our overflows; outside contractors have been hired to conduct assessments of our system: and engineers have been hired to engineer sewer line replacements.

In order to pay for these improvements, the Village has to borrow money. Last year we borrowed \$815,000 for DEC-related matters and this year, we will be borrowing up to \$5 million to address DEC requirements under the Order. All costs associated with the DEC Consent Order are required to be charged against our Sewer Fund. As a result, you will be seeing an additional line item added to your water/sewer bill. "DEC/Capital" will identify a surcharge for the capital improvements to our water/sewer system. This additional surcharge is attributed solely to costs associated with infrastructure improvements. While we realize that this surcharge will significantly increase your quarterly water/sewer bill, please know that we do not make any money on our water or sewer funds. Any increases are due to increases to our costs - and with major infrastructure improvements, that cost is huge.

Kenmore is not alone. In fact, we were the last municipality in New York to enter into a revised Consent Order with the DEC. We understand that it's the DEC's job to ensure that municipalities across the state make improvements to reduce overflows and other leaks in their systems. Unfortunately, there is a huge cost associated with this. The good news is that sewer linings will reduce the amount of wastewater leaking from our system, will result in fewer sewer line breaks and will improve the overall function of our system.

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You can also help to reduce the amount of wastewater entering into our water system. Make sure that all of your down spouts are properly connected. Keep your sump pump and bubbler free from roots and other blockages.

Your water/sewer bill continues to show a line for water, sewer and UTL Surcharge. The water and sewer funds are not funded through taxes. All the money needed to operate these budgets comes from the money collected from your water/sewer bill. We raise this revenue in 2 ways - rate (which is based on actual use) and a UTS (quarterly payment). While we could simply raise the revenue to operate these funds using only rate charges or just from surcharges alone, the Village has found that the best way to raise revenue is through a combination of both water/sewer rate and surcharges. While using rates allows us to charge based on actual usage, usage can fluctuate, which in turn, can result in shortfalls in the needed revenues. Conversely, while surcharges afford us an exact figure - a definite amount of known revenues - this places a proportionately greater burden on low users. Therefore, for the past decade, both the rates and surcharges, together allow us to pay our operating expenses in water and sewer funds.

The new "DEC/Capital" surcharge will be used to off set the costs associated with large capital improvements to our system, which are not part of the regular operating expenses of the water and sewer funds.