



Sanitary Sewer Education

What's the issue?

In the Village of Berkeley, there are two different underground flowage systems; the sanitary system and the storm water system. The sanitary system carries waste water from homes and businesses via bathrooms, dishwashers, sinks, washing machines and other simple waste producing necessities. Traveling through an underground system of pipes connected to homes and businesses, this type of waste water eventually finds its way to a treatment facility where it undergoes treatment making it safe to discharge and reuse. The storm system, however, enters a completely separate set of underground pipes through basins and street curb drains, discharging untreated water into nearby creeks and rivers. Polluted runoff is the nation's greatest threat to a clean-water environment and a major concern for the Village of Berkeley and its residents.

When is the Village Responsible for Sewer Lines?

In most cases, the property owner, not the Village, is responsible for repairing the sewer lines running from the house to the public main in the street. These pipes are referred to as "laterals" that service the private homes or businesses they are connected to. The lateral connection may even extend outside your property line in order to connect to the public sanitary main which is the responsibility of the Village to clean and maintain.

What are sewer laterals?

Sewer Laterals are underground pipes that connect your home to the main sewer line in the street. Their job is to carry wastewater out of your house and are the responsibility of the building owner by Village ordinance:

9-1-2: SERVICE PIPES B-6. Any repairs necessitated by damage to the sanitary sewer pipe between the main and the private property of the property owner shall be at the sole cost and expense and responsibility of the property owner. Any repairs necessitated by damage to the sanitary sewer pipe main shall be at the sole cost and expense and responsibility of the village. (1976 Code § 13.20.060)

The upper lateral is the section that runs from your home to your property line. Your property line usually stops at the curb or sidewalk depending on your location within the Village. The lower lateral is the section that connects to the public main sewer line and is sometimes referred to as the "drop". Even though this section of the lateral isn't technically on your property, you – not the Village – would be responsible for repairing any damage to it. When the building is built, the owner pays to connect to the sanitary main and by way of that expense, the building retains ownership of that vital connection to the main.

Maintaining the private sanitary lateral requires regularly rodding out your line if you have a history of back-ups. It may even require costly replacement of sections both large and small. In some instances, repairs may even be required within the street or parkway which would still be the responsibility of the owner to repair. Regular maintenance of the lateral can prevent and in many more cases actually catch problems like breaks, cracks, offset connections and clogs. The most common cause for clogs within the system come from root penetration and growth. It is important to note, however, that without cracks, line breaks and offset connections, roots cannot enter a private lateral. Maintenance can identify these items in need of repair and prevent this damage, but it is the responsibility of the property owner to do so. A routine maintenance schedule provides the most benefit to a property owner in defense of possible problems that lead to future breaks and offset connections.

