INFRASTRUCTURE POSITION STATEMENT

Krista Wolter | Mark Azman | Greg Peterson

At a glance:

- A study, not installation. We want real data on sewer for the unsewered core of North Oaks, not a construction decision.
- No one is forced to connect now. Any hookup requirement would come only out of a public process with community input.
- Real numbers before any decision. Costs, funding and options will be published and discussed openly.

Why study city sewer?

North Oaks has about 1,300 septic systems, including almost 150 cesspools and seepage pits. Several pressures make it time to study the alternatives.

- **Space is running out**. More residents each year have little or no room left for their next septic system, which leads to variance requests over setbacks. Relaxing setbacks only helps so much. Some lots simply have no room left, and some owners must get an easement from a neighbor.
- **New systems are expensive**. Gone are the days when a new septic system could be installed for $10,000 or less. Today we see costs from $35,000 to $100,000, depending on location and topography, including design, installation and landscaping.
- **New systems are intrusive**. Mound systems can be unsightly. Where space is tight, advanced treatment units such as Multi-Flo systems require costly annual maintenance on top of pumping every two years.
- **Systems are hard on our woods**. Meeting today's size requirements can mean removing dozens of trees from a wooded lot.
- **Old cesspools and seepage pits threaten our water**. Some sit near lakes and wetlands, putting water quality and natural resources at risk.

Some will say owners moved into North Oaks knowing the challenges with septic systems (buyer beware). We recognize that. On balance though, especially when we consider the potential impact of failing septic systems on the entire community, the above factors weigh in favor of a comprehensive study of city sewer options.

CONCLUSION: We need to study city-wide sewer not because we want to, but because we have to. The time to study and plan is now, while we can do it carefully, before failing systems force rushed decisions.

What has the City done so far?

- **Preliminary engineering review**. The City began in 2025 with a preliminary review by Sambatek, the City's engineer at the time.
- **Septic ordinance review**. An ordinance subcommittee was also tasked with review of the septic ordinance, including setbacks, pumping requirements, realistic sizing requirements, and related updates.
- **Met Council Systems Statements**. The Met Council issued a "Systems Statement" with incorrect population, household and employment projections for North Oaks. It also limited how North Oaks could use Met Council sewer connections. The Council voted 4-1 to object (Wolter, Azman, Sayre, Shah voted yes; Gaspard voted no), both to correct the projections and to take a step toward City control over whether to connect to available sewer lines.
- **Settlement with the Met Council**. The City settled the dispute successfully. The settlement preserves the City's right to seek more control over sewer connections. Importantly, it does not force sewer on North Oaks; it lets the City explore connection options. This right would not now exist had the Council voted 'no' with Council Member Gaspard.
- **Regional capacity study**. The Met Council currently is studying regional wastewater capacity for the northeast metro, including North Oaks properties outside the current sewer service area (MUSA; "Capacity Study"). The study is scheduled for completion in the spring of 2027.
- **Golf club application**. A property owner near the Golf Club has applied to connect to the Club's sewer line and the Club has no objection. Because several very old, noncompliant systems (including cesspools) are nearby, the Planning Commission is also checking whether the Club's line could serve those neighbors. This is a local review driven by specific failing systems. It is moving independently of any citywide study.
- **Water Modeling.** During the City's negotiations with White Bear Township over water service, the City engineer did an initial study to review city water modeling and to understand our supply risks. This was prudent given the challenges of the negotiations with the Township, the concerns about continued water supply, and to better understand the scope of a potential system.

Our plan for the study

Alongside the Met Council's Capacity Study, we propose having the City Engineer build on Sambatek's work. These are measured, community-centered steps. This is a study, not installation. We propose:

1. **One webpage for everything.** Establish a storyboard on the City website to collect all related materials, provide continuous and timely updates, and a

timeline of events and milestones. This would be a one-stop location citizens can access and review.
2. **Regular Public Updates**. Staff presents scheduled updates at City Council meetings, also posted online.
3. **A stakeholder committee**. The Council forms a committee, including NOHOA, to set the study's scope and schedule. The scope covers system modeling; costs (total system, individual hookup, operations and maintenance); funding sources; equitable cost sharing; timelines; and hookup options Residents will have chances to give input.
4. **Partnership with NOHOA**. Work closely with NOHOA so the process protects residents' privacy and respects NOHOA's private roads, trails, and easements.
5. **Local control.** Keep working to secure City control over connections to Met Council mainlines, without jeopardizing our density or culture.
6. **Conduct the Study**. Complete the study and prepare a draft report.
7. **Listening Sessions.** Publish the draft report and hold multiple community listening sessions.
8. **Final Report.** Using community feedback, the Capacity Study and any updated analysis, prepare a final report and evaluate next steps.

If sewer moves forward, when would it be installed?

That depends on the study, community feedback, funding, and cooperation with the Met Council. Even if the community chooses to move ahead, it would likely be years before any pipe goes into the ground.

Will I be forced to hook-up?

Not now, and not on a fixed deadline. Part of the study is developing fair, reasonable hookup options. Here is where we stand on several questions we have heard;

- "I don't want to hook up." That's ok. Pay no hookup fees until you decide to connect.
- "I recently put in a new septic system." That's ok. Connect when you're ready.
- "Can I hook up as soon as the system is ready?" Yes.
- "Can I wait until my current system fails and needs replacement?" Yes.

One option we'll study would require a hookup only when your existing system fails and must be replaced anyway. No decision on any requirement would be made without public review.

What will sewer cost, and who will pay?

The most important thing to understand is that the City will make every effort to make the cost of hooking up to municipal sewer **less expensive** than installing a new septic system. Early, preliminary estimates suggest a price tag in the range of $15,000 to $30,000 per home, in addition to the allocated cost of the sewer system as a whole. Please don't let rumor drive fear. We will need data-driven estimates for an informed discussion, and we'll provide them.

About 40% of homes, mostly along the City's outer edge, already are on sewer. Any funding plan has to be fair to both homes on septic and homes that already have sewer service.

Have more questions?

Reach out to any of us. We will do our best to respond promptly.