



AHCA Relief Sewer Project Meeting  
August 15, 2018 - 7:00 PM  
[AcademyHeightsMD.org](http://AcademyHeightsMD.org)

**What was the purpose and scope of the August 15 meeting?**

The meeting was held to share details of the planned relief sewer project and how it will address the ongoing sewage backups, to offer possible additional preventive measures, and to address residents' questions and concerns. The expertise of the representatives from Baltimore County Public Works who attended is primarily in sewage as opposed to groundwater or storm water.

**Who provided information and support to the community at the meeting?**

Dave Bayer and Kenny Green from Baltimore County Public Works (BCPW) discussed the planned relief sewer project. Councilman Quirk prefaced their remarks and introduced his legislative aide, Cathy Engers. Several candidates for local office were also in attendance, as was Joan Hatcher from the Maryland Insurance Administration.

**What has previously been done in attempt to address sewage backflow?**

The county-owned infrastructure handling sewage in the Academy Heights area was previously relined to prevent ground water infiltration causing overloading of the sewer system. This rehabilitation was insufficiently successful, so the current plan is to add more capacity such that the system can handle a greater volume of extraneous water and sewage. BCPW has done and continues to do flow monitoring. In addition, several years ago, smoke testing was done to see whether the storm water and sewage systems were interconnected. Instances of interconnection were remedied; however, the county only maintains public sewer infrastructure, not the private lines connecting individual homes to the system. BCPW used cameras to monitor some connections between the private lines and public system in Academy Heights. During wet weather, significant leaking was observed at these connections.

**What is currently planned to address sewage backflow in Academy Heights?**

A contract was awarded this week to replace existing infrastructure with a new relief sewer along the alley behind Edmondson Ave. between Stratford Rd. and Lambeth Rd., south along Lambeth Rd. to Edmondson Ave., east along Edmondson Ave. over to Overbrook Rd., and along a portion of Overbrook Rd. The existing piping in these areas is 8-inch pipe. It will be replaced with 12-inch and 15-inch piping thereby adding additional capacity to the sewer system. It has been determined through hydraulic modeling that the additional volume can be handled by the existing 8-inch pipe at Overbrook Rd. The existing 8-inch pipe has a steeper grade, resulting in faster flow.

**Has a more aggressive approach been considered?**

Controlling costs was a consideration in determining the current approach. In addition, the downstream pipes in Baltimore City are not large enough to accommodate a more significant increase in capacity here. If volume were created that those pipes cannot handle, there would be even more significant issues at that juncture than there are in Academy Heights now. Baltimore City is under a consent order that should require them to address the capacity issues on their soil,

but BCPW cannot speak to the timeline. Furthermore, increasing the capacity beyond what is required for sewage ignores infiltration issues, which create extra costs for pumping, conveying, and treating a greater volume of sewage-contaminated water.

**Who will perform the construction, when will it start, and how long will it take?**

The contract was awarded to Peak Construction with the low bid of \$1,492,000. Peak Construction is a prequalified contractor with Baltimore County, which means they remain in sufficiently good standing with the county to have requalified within the past three years. They will take and submit a video of the neighborhood before any work is begun, to protect property owners in the event their property is disturbed. The project is projected to require 311 working days. BCPW has not met with the contractor yet, so BCPW does not have a schedule at this time. It will be at least 30 days from the awarding of the contract, which occurred this week, to the beginning of construction. Construction could start before the end of September or as late as early November. Construction will adhere to restricted hours.

**Should Academy Heights anticipate any interruptions to service during construction?**

The contract documents state that sewage flow in the existing sewer and house connections is to be maintained at all times during construction. To achieve this, a bypass pipe will be installed to limit service interruption.

**Who can residents contact with concerns?**

Kenny Green is the most important person to contact with issues regarding construction because he has day-to-day oversight of the construction contractor. Residents are encouraged to communicate any issues to his office at 410-887-3531, rather than directly to the contractors. For other issues, 410-887-5210 is the emergency number for sewer service at the Bureau of Utilities.

**To what extent will the proposed project address current issues? When?**

Hydraulic modeling indicates that this change should remedy issues that were known as of 2015 when the relief sewer plans were developed. Modeling is not based upon rainfall, but the relief sewer has not been designed to accommodate rainfall at the level of the May event. The relief sewer project will take approximately 15 months to complete. Homeowners may experience relief sooner as relevant segments are completed. Sewage capacity relief will not address storm water issues such as overflowing alley grates.

**To what extent will the proposed project address anticipated future issues?**

When new development is proposed, its impact on sewer collection systems is considered, and developers are required to build relief sewers when an adverse impact can be foreseen. If this plan does not provide future relief, there is not currently a plan B; one would have to be developed. The relief sewer plan is plan B after rehabilitating the aging infrastructure was done.

**Will the increased capacity help those residents whose homes are not located along the lines that will be replaced?**

It should according to BCPW's modeling, which is showing that the areas west of the planned relief sewer, i.e. along Greenlow Rd., are being impacted due to back-up from downstream piping.

**What other factors besides capacity may influence sewage backflow?**

This year, there have been 18 inches of rainfall since June 1; 8 inches would be a typical amount for that time of the year. Rainfall affects the volume of fluid in the sewage system when clean water is able to enter, such as at leaking junctions between private and public sewer lines or when sump pumps discharge into sanitary sewer lines.

**What can residents do to protect their properties until construction is complete?**

If residents notice that their pipes are running any more slowly than is normal, they are encouraged to call the Bureau of Utilities at 410-887-5210 (the emergency number for sewer service) and request that their pipes be cleaned out. The county will only clean out public pipes, not the private lines connecting service to individual homes, but they will be able to indicate whether the public line is the one clogged. Residents can also contribute to preventing clogs by not flushing baby wipes or “flushable” personal care wipes.

Residents can choose to install backflow preventers. Backflow preventers must be properly installed and maintained in order to function. Residents have reported that their backflow valves have stopped the inflow of sewage, but seem to promote groundwater flooding, necessitating the installation of sump pumps in addition to the backflow preventers.

Residents can reduce groundwater pooling and infiltration by installing downspout extenders to redirect water away from the in-ground pipes carrying rainwater to the alleys; these pipes can overflow, saturating the ground in a concentrated area. Residents could also potentially reduce infiltration by replacing the original sanitary sewer terracotta pipes (laterals) connecting their individual homes to the public sewer system; however, the cost would be approximately \$5000 per home.

**What else can the county do to support residents in protecting their properties?**

There is not currently a program to support homeowners in replacing the sanitary sewer terracotta pipes along their private lines, but there have been conversations within BCPW regarding how other municipalities have handled this issue. Maryland Department of the Environment has a program offering low-interest loans over 20-30 years that could be allocated for property owners’ replacement of sewer laterals; the county would have to apply for this program (residents and associations cannot). Baltimore County has already applied for this financing to support a different area in the county. Revisions to the Baltimore County plumbing code to ensure proper installation of backflow preventers would also support those residents who choose to install these valves.

**What else was discussed at the meeting?**

Residents communicated the regularity with which many have been experiencing issues: these issues have not been limited to periods of unusual rainfall. Residents shared their experiences that when one problem is remedied, the sewage finds another outlet. Residents also expressed concerns about the issues’ impact on property values and the neighborhood housing market.

**How can residents stay informed about the planned sewer relief project?**

BCPW will keep Cathy Engers informed; she will communicate to the civic association president, who will communicate to the community. A link to information about the relief sewer project, e.g. contract drawings, will be sent out in this way, as will the schedule once available.