Terrebonne Wastewater System and Sanitary District Formation

FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions)

Why was this Terrebonne Wastewater Feasibility Study initiated? What's the County's role?

This study was initiated by a Terrebonne resident who petitioned and gathered signatures from individuals in the community who were interested in seeing an updated wastewater feasibility study for Terrebonne. In response, Deschutes County agreed to fund the feasibility study, but has no intent to operate and maintain a sewer system in Terrebonne. Previous studies conducted in 1984 and 1999 failed to result in a wastewater system due to a lack of community support at the time.

What were the outcomes of the feasibility study?

1. Researched the extent of existing septic system issues and problems in Terrebonne (unincorporated community boundary).
2. Explored options for a municipal wastewater (sewer) system in Terrebonne.
3. Estimated construction costs and operational costs to determine potential sewer utility rates for residences and businesses in Terrebonne.
4. Explored potential grant funding opportunities to fund construction.
5. Identified governance options for operation of a sewer utility.
6. Outlined next steps for the community to take in establishing a sewer system in Terrebonne.

What's wrong with the septic systems that currently serve Terrebonne?

Many of the septic systems in Terrebonne were installed over shallow bedrock more than 30 years ago and are reaching the end of their life cycles. Failing septic systems can result in health risks, expensive repairs, and the closure of residences and businesses when septic systems cannot be repaired.

Are local septic systems are experiencing problems?

Deschutes County has observed a noticeable increase in septic repair permits in the last few years, including businesses requiring expensive repairs. The Deschutes County Sanitarian has reported that Terrebonne has a septic system failure rate that is roughly two times higher than the rest of the County.

Are there any health risks to people or pets?

When septic systems fail, people and pets can be exposed to raw sewage that includes infectious bacteria, viruses, and parasites. Toxic fumes including Methane gas, Hydrogen Sulfide gas, and airborne bacteria can lead to sinus infections and other respiratory problems.

Does the lack of sewers limit opportunities for residential and business development?

Certainly. There are several commercial and residential lots in Terrebonne that cannot be developed because of inadequate lot size or soil conditions for septic systems. More businesses will open and stay open in Terrebonne if reliable sewer service is available. Installation of public sewer would help bolster the local economy with new homes, businesses, and jobs.

What options are being considered to sewer Terrebonne? What types of systems could work?

Through the process of the feasibility study, the project team explored a variety of possible sewer system designs for Terrebonne, including a facultative lagoon, packaged treatment plant, and a STEP collection system connected to the City of Redmond wastewater treatment system. Input gathered from community meetings helped to inform the preliminary sewer design process. Based monetary factors, non-monetary factors, and stakeholder input, it was determined that the preferred system alternative is a STEP collection system connected to the City of Redmond wastewater treatment system.

How much would sewers cost local homeowners?

The exact upfront and ongoing costs are unknown at this point and would depend on system construction costs, the extent of grant funding, and what potential ratepayers can afford. The TSAG and project team is working to keep rates and fees affordable for customers and comparable to nearby communities by minimizing construction costs and pursuing grants and low-interest loans. Although these are subject to change, the latest financial model estimates that connection fees would be $4,773 and monthly rates would be $65 for each residence (assuming sufficient customer connections and $1.8 Million in grant funding).

How long will it take to install a sewer system?

It could take approximately 2-3 years for design, funding, contractor bidding, and construction of a municipal sewer system. The project schedule estimates that funding applications would occur in 2023 and design and construction would occur 2024-2025.

What's involved with decommissioning septic systems?

If a septic tank effluent pressure (STEP) collection system is installed, septic tanks in good condition could remain and be retrofitted with small low-pressure pumps connected to the public sewer. If septic tanks are in poor condition, they should be pumped dry and then removed, filled in place, or crushed and buried in place. In both cases, the septic drainfield can be removed after a year without use, according to the County's Tank Abandonment Procedures.

Who would own and operate Terrebonne's sewer system?

Deschutes County has no intent to own and operate a sewer system in Terrebonne. The public sewer system in Terrebonne would be owned and operated by the Terrebonne Sanitary District.

Who decides about sewers? Will property owners have a say?

This feasibility study process gathered and incorporated feedback from Terrebonne property owners through a series of open house events. A group of Terrebonne stakeholders known as the Terrebonne Sewer Advisory Group (TSAG) has been meeting monthly to provide input on the planning process and represent community interests.

The decision to move forward with a public sewer system will depend on a grassroots movement of community members forming a sewer district and securing construction funding with the completed Preliminary Engineering Report. The sanitary district board members are owners and residents within the District service area and will be elected by electors within the district to represent their interests. After confirming project funding sources, construction costs, and customer charges, the Sanitary District Board will make the official decision whether or not to proceed with installation of the proposed STEP collection system.