

A change in plans

As you know the Coop voted to ask Madison Water Utility to provide water to the neighborhood. The work was to be accomplished in 2026. As the City planned for the project they determined that the condition of the soils and other infrastructure made it far more efficient and cost effective to combine the water installation with a full reconstruction of the streets and the sanitary and storm sewers. The enlarged project will be done over three years, starting in 2027 and tackling a third of the neighborhood in each year.

The assessments

The City is working out the details of the project and its financing, and firm numbers are not yet available. They do expect that the full project may add only 5% to 15% to the assessments projected for water alone. The reason is that much of the budget for water was in excavation and street work. With the more comprehensive project, the street work would be handled by the City's normal street assessment policy where the City pays around 90% of the costs. The water portion (largest) of the assessments could still be paid off over thirty years, and the City is exploring how to extend that longer pay back period to all special assessments that would be a part of this project.

The DNR loan grant

You may remember that we applied for a grant from the DNR to reduce the loan rate and the payment amounts. The grant was awarded but it was for the year 2026 and can't be used for the later project. The City expects to reapply for a grant in each of the new project years. Since we are already judged eligible the applications should succeed if money is available.

Other individual costs

With the water project we knew that each property would need to contract a plumber to install a water lateral at a cost of \$3,000 to \$9,000. The City would subsidize 50% of that cost up to \$3,000. There will now also be the need to contract a plumber for a sewer lateral relocation. The City subsidizes that cost at up to approximately \$14,000. So many lateral installations in a short timeframe does raise difficulties, and the City will be looking for ways to simplify this process and minimize any disruptions to services.

Overview and consequences

The Lake Forest Neighborhood is an unusual one, low lying with a high water table and unstable soils. It was established over a hundred years ago as Madison's first suburb and much of its infrastructure is old and outdated. The members of the water Coop had already determined that it was necessary to abandon its old lines and accept City water. The sanitary sewer main is also in poor condition, and, while not at immediate risk of failure, is in need of replacement. As with the Coop water main, it runs through backyards which makes repair or response to a sewer main backup very difficult. The new sewer and water mains will be in the streets.

The cost of this comprehensive project for properties is unquestionably high, but the City is making great efforts to reduce the burden as much as possible for residents. And for a relatively small increase over the cost for water alone the neighborhood will receive completely up-to-date infrastructure, including a reliable sanitary sewer and much improved flood control.

Our neighborhood is also unusual as well as desirable with its low density and proximity to nature. A consequence is that some major costs of the reconstruction are assessed from a small number of properties. If our density were higher and buildings were along all sides of Martin and Carver the individual assessments would be considerably less.

More information

As said the City is still working out the details of the comprehensive project. They hope to schedule a virtual meeting by the end of next February with more details and for questions and answers. All property owners will be notified when the date is established. The Arboretum Neighborhood Association also plans an in-person meeting in that month for residents and City officials to discuss the project.