



FAQ Washburn Sewer Services

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Sewer Rate Increase

Q: What is the current sewer rate in Washburn?

A: The current sewer rate in Washburn is \$21 per month. Sewer maintenance fees have remained unchanged for 16 years, with no adjustments made since 2008*. The revenue from sewer fees at the current rate will not cover the annual operating costs in FY25.

** See page 2 for more on the history of the Washburn Sanitary Sewer System.*

Q: What is the proposed sewer rate?

A: The Board is proposing sewer rate increases* in 2024 and 2025 to support the operation and maintenance of the current system. The proposed increases include:

- \$6/month per household effective 11/2024 resulting in a rate of \$27 per month.
- \$4/month per household increase effective 11/2025 resulting in a rate of \$31 per month.
- The proposed rates are less than the cumulative rate of inflation since 2008.

Q: Why is a rate increase needed?

A: Monthly sewer fees cover maintenance and operations costs, not system improvements. The costs for operations and maintenance are increasing. Sewer maintenance fees have not increased since 2008. The current revenue will not cover the annual operating costs of the system. For FY25, a shortfall of approximately \$22,000 is expected.

Q: What is currently covered by my sewer fees?

A: Black Hawk County contracts with Urban Services, LLC to operate and maintain the Washburn Sanitary Sewer System. Services provided through monthly sewer fees:

- 24/7 routine operations, maintenance of the system, groundskeeping, & utilities
 - This includes prompt response and service with lower than market hourly rate on service, vacuum pumping, and lagoon operations.
 - Historical knowledge of system and liaison consulting for BHC.
- Preventative pump maintenance; equipment and pump repairs

- Monitoring and reporting on daily flow and lagoon levels as required by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources

Costs of operations included in the contract with Urban Services, LLC:

- Costs for vehicles, trailers, tools, fuel, utility locating, storage of pump inventory, etc. to perform maintenance and repair work.
- Continuing education for contractor and employees to maintain wastewater treatment licenses required by the Iowa Department of Natural Resources
- Training on the proper use, maintenance and repair of the pumps used by the Washburn system.
- Insurance carried by the contractor, Urban Services, LLC as required by the County.

Q: What improvements are being made currently?

A: The Board of Supervisors has prioritized \$735,000 in federal ARPA funds to address Washburn sewer improvements to avoid placing the financial burden on Washburn residents. In June 2023 the Board approved a contract with Urban Services, LLC to use \$440,000 of the \$735,000 of federal ARPA funds to replace the pump control panels throughout the system. Had the cost of this improvement been passed to Washburn residents, sewer fees would have needed to increase to \$55/month.

Q: What are the next steps for sewer upgrades?

A: The Board plans to use federal ARPA funds to hire an engineering firm to evaluate the system and identify additional needed improvements. The evaluation is expected to be completed in September 2024. Projects may include manhole repair and lagoon valve repairs, among other projects. Identified improvements may be eligible to be covered through ARPA funds.

Q: What do other small towns pay for similar type sewer systems?

A: Monthly rates for other communities with similar types of lagoon systems* based on informal research:

- Elk Run Heights \$40/month
- Evansdale \$48.60/month average
- Hudson \$54.85/month average
- Raymond \$108.37/month

**Communities may not have individual grinder pumps for each address*

Q: How does the Washburn Sewer system differ from other rural waste management options?

A: The topography of the Washburn area, combined with the smaller lot sizes, results in an inability to use septic systems successfully. To address this issue, a system of grinder pumps and piping to a lagoon was constructed in 1999, and septic systems were no longer permitted to be used in the area. Between the years 1999 through 2015, Washburn sewer customers paid an additional fee of \$29.93 per month, to pay off a construction bond when the new system of grinder pumps and piping to a lagoon was constructed.

Guidelines for Sewer Usage/Maintenance

Q: Who should I contact with sewer problems?

A: Urban Services, LLC is contracted to maintain the system. Contact Urban Services, LLC at (319) 240-3967; the number is also posted on every pump alarm panel. You may need to leave a message. If the alarm light is still on and the customer doesn't see the contractor within four hours, please call the BHC Board of Supervisors Office at (319) 833-3072 during regular business hours and we will reach out to Urban Services, LLC. Typical action time is within two hours during regular business hours.

Q: What if I notice a problem in my home sewer system?

A: If you notice that your toilets aren't flushing or water is draining very slowly or not at all, please check the alarm panel on your pump. If the light is on, please **CALL Urban Services, LLC at (319) 240-3967**. If the alarm light is still on and the customer doesn't see the contractor within four hours, please call the BHC Board of Supervisors Office at (319) 833-3072 during regular business hours and we will reach out to Urban Services, LLC. Typical action time is within two hours during regular business hours.

Q: Can my sump pump impact the sanitary sewer system?

A: No sump pumps (or roof downspouts, foundation drains, areaway drains, or other sources of surface runoff or ground water) should be connected to the sanitary sewer system. It can result in too much water getting into the sewer system, causing back-ups or pump problems.

Q: What can I do to help protect the Washburn Sewer system?

A: There are pumps located throughout town that deliver sewage to the lagoon located on Foulk Road. Due to the nature of this pump system, there are many items that should not be flushed down a toilet, or allowed into a drain that leads to this system.

This includes but is not limited to:

- Flushable wipes
- Dental floss
- Hygiene products such as (tampons maxi pads, and their wrappers)
- Diapers (child OR adult)
- Cleaning rags
- Nails, screws, and other hardware
- Small toys such as Hot Wheels cars

Ordinances and Contact Information

Q: Where can I read more about Washburn water and sewer ordinances?

A: The rules and regulations for Washburn water and sanitary sewer systems are outlined in Black Hawk County Ordinances Chapter 13. Follow this link to review this information:
tinyurl.com/2mv8rftb.

Q: How can I contact the Board of Supervisors?

A: The Black Hawk County Board of Supervisors can be reached in the following ways:

- Board Office - (319) 833-3072 – supervisors@blackhawkcounty.iowa.gov
- Find direct contact information for members of the Black Hawk County Board of Supervisors on the BHC website at blackhawkcounty.iowa.gov.
- Board of Supervisors Meetings - Tuesdays at 9 a.m.
 - In person at BHC Courthouse 316 East 5th Street, Room 201 Waterloo
 - Attend on zoom by following this link: tinyurl.com/yckk3ukw

Q: Who is contracted to provide service and maintenance for the Washburn Sanitary Sewer System?

A: Urban Services, LLC - (319) 240-3967. See page 3 for guidance on when to call for service.