

SEWER LATERAL INSPECTION PROGRAM FAQ

1) **Q:** Who owns the sanitary sewer infrastructure?

A: The sanitary sewer consists of both public and private infrastructure. Brentwood Borough owns and maintains the public main lines, which are generally located within the boundaries of a street or other municipal right-of-way. Property owners are responsible for private laterals, which are generally designed to connect a single structure to the municipal main. The tap is considered to be part of the public sewer, and any repairs to this section of pipe are performed at the Borough's expense.

2) **Q:** Why is the Borough requiring the inspection of sewer laterals?

A: Brentwood Borough and all other communities that utilize the Allegheny County Sanitary Authority (ALCOSAN) for sewage waste processing are under a federal court order to reduce the infiltration of fresh water into the sanitary sewer system. Water enters the system through defects in both public and private infrastructure. During severe weather conditions, large volumes of water enter ALCOSAN facilities. ALCOSAN equipment is unable to process the full amount of water and sewage and, historically, had no other solution but to reduce capacity by discharging untreated waste into area waterways. As part of a consent decree with the state and federal governments, the Borough is making substantial investments to its municipal main lines. However, even a total upgrade of public infrastructure will abate this problem by only 40 to 50 percent. The remaining groundwater enters the sanitary sewer system through flaws in private laterals.

3) **Q:** When must a sewer lateral inspection video be submitted to the Borough?

A: Receipt and review of a sewer lateral video is a requirement of any private property transaction, including transfers between living family members. The video must be submitted prior to closing, except under the special circumstances listed in Q12 below. The Borough does not require a video inspection as part of the refinance of a mortgage. Additionally, the following transactions are exempt from inspection requirements:

- transfers to an heir due to the death of the property owner;
- transfers to a spouse upon marriage or from a spouse upon divorce;
- transfers to a trustee from a trustor;
- transfers to a financial institution as a result of foreclosure.

4) **Q:** For how long is a sewer lateral inspection video valid?

A: Any video inspection performed up to five years before the sale of a property is valid. However, the Sewer Lateral Compliance Letter is nontransferable.

5) **Q:** Am I required to use a specific plumber to perform the inspection?

A: There are no restrictions as to who can complete a video inspection. However, sewer lateral repairs may only be completed by a master plumber who is registered with the Allegheny County Health Department. By state law, property owners are not permitted to correct defects.

6) **Q:** What are the standard for video format and quality?

A: By ordinance, the sewer lateral video must be provided in DVD format. The Borough maintains a library of these discs so as to track the historical conditions of private laterals. It is important that the video provide a clear and complete view of the entire private line. The Borough reserves the right to reject videos as incomplete if any of the following conditions prevent proper evaluation:

- Mud or debris on the lens of the camera;
- Lens obscured by water in the base of the line;
- Static or pixilation;
- Failure to camera at an appropriate speed (it is best practice for the plumber to pause the device at each joint);
- Failure to camera the entire length of the line from the building trap to the tap at the public main.

7) **Q:** My plumber cannot perform a video inspection because the camera will not pass through the building trap. What are my options?

A: The majority of private laterals in Brentwood are separated from the structure's internal plumbing by a cast iron trap. Due to a combination of the tight design of these fixtures and decades of material corrosion, maintenance equipment sometimes cannot pass through the trap. If you encounter such a situation, you have the following options:

- If the line contains a cleanout, the plumber can utilize this access point. Please ensure that the plumber cameras in both directions from the cleanout.
- If the sewer taps into the municipal main near a manhole, the plumber may be able to run a standard camera in the reverse direction.
- Consider getting a second opinion. Some plumbers have specialized pushrod equipment than can allow the travel through pesky traps.
- A small number of plumbers have access to robotic cameras. These devices can typically access a private lateral from the municipal main regardless of the distance between the tap and the nearest manhole. However, such inspections are typically twice the price of a standard video inspection.
- Unfortunately, if none of the above options yield positive results, excavation will be required. The plumber can gain access by either replacing the existing building trap or by installing a cleanout port.

8) **Q:** What sort of defects would prevent issuance of a compliance letter?

A: The majority of the structures in Brentwood are in excess of 50 years in age. These buildings are generally serviced by terra cotta lines. The Borough recognizes that clay pipe is not entirely watertight and performs its evaluations accordingly. As a general rule, the Borough does not require the repair of offsets at joints or hairline cracks in the pipe wall. Examples of defects that will not prevent issuance of a compliance letter include:



Minor Offset Joint



Major Offset Joint



Pipe Wall Infiltration

If any of the following defects are discovered, the Borough will require remediation:

Root Intrusion: The presence of small root ends in a joint will not preclude issuance of a compliance document. Large buildups, such as those pictured here, must be addressed, typically through the use of a hydro-jetting machine. If no other defects are present in the line, the Borough will issue a



Moderate Roots



Heavy Roots

compliance document upon removal. The new property owner is responsible for developing a maintenance plan for ensuring continued line clearance. Typically, this maintenance involves the annual or biennial snaking of the line or the use of a chemical compound (i.e. Root-X).

Structural Cracks: These photos show examples of common structural defects. Radial cracks on or near a sectional joint are the most frequently noted flaws. These items can typically be remediated through traditional excavation and spot repair or through the installation of a cured-in-place pipe liner. If a number of defects are observed, the latter option may be the most cost effective.



Longitudinal Crack



Circular Crack



Missing Pipe



Broken Pipe



Partial Collapse

Structural Collapse: On rare occasions, a sewer line is discovered to contain a completely collapsed section. Typically, this defect is the result of intrusion by a major tree root or because of surface level disturbance (for example, a driveway or retaining wall were constructed over the line without a proper base). Collapsed sections of pipe can generally only be remediated through excavation.



Fully Collapsed

9) **Q:** My plumber has made the necessary repairs. What sort of evidence do I need to provide to the Borough?

A: The plumber must submit a new DVD video to the Borough that shows the final condition of the line.

10) **Q:** I want to receive additional quotes before making repairs. How can the plumber gain access to the inspection results?

A: It is prudent to attain at least three quotes prior to completing any necessary repairs. Plumbers are welcomed to view the inspection video at the Brentwood Municipal Building. Please have the plumber call in advance to ensure that staff will be available for a meeting.

11) **Q:** My plumber is unable to make the repairs prior to the scheduled closing date. Does this mean that we have to delay the sale?

A: The Borough has a procedure for allowing transactions to close without the repair of noted defects. In order to receive a temporary certificate of compliance, the Borough must receive a copy of a repair proposal from a master plumber, a certified check or money order equal to the quotation listed on the proposal, and a signed copy of the escrow agreement, a copy of which can be found on the municipal website. The repairs must be completed within 21 days of the recording of the sale. Upon remediation of the defects and receipt of a new DVD inspection video, the Borough will release the escrowed funds directly to the issuer of the check. The Borough cannot forward payment to the plumber.

12) **Q:** I am buying a bank-owned/HUD-owned property. I am prohibited from completing any repairs at the property prior to closing. How do I adhere to the sewer lateral inspection requirement?

A: Under extremely limited circumstances, the Borough can permit the sale of a property without the completion of a sewer lateral inspection. The Borough must receive \$500 in collateral in the form of a certified check or money order, as well as a signed copy of the escrow agreement, a copy of which can be found on the municipal website. Please note that purchasing a property without performing a video inspection is an inherently risky proposition. The buyer must supply a DVD video within 21 days of the recording of the sale. The new owner is responsible for remediating any noted defects, regardless of the extent of the needed scope of

work. Upon remediation of the defects and receipt of a new DVD inspection video, the Borough will release the escrowed funds directly to the issuer of the check.

13) **Q:** The plumber determined that my property is connected to a common lateral. Does this mean that my neighbor is partially responsible for the costs of any repairs?

A: Legally, yes. If a lateral conveys sewage to more than one property, an easement should be recorded on the deeds to both parcels. Unfortunately, many of the homes on the Borough were constructed before the recording of such easements was common practices. The Borough cannot force a neighboring property owner to financially contribute to repairs. However, the property owner may seek relief through the district magistrate.

14) **Q:** A portion of my sewer lateral is located on a neighboring property and/or within the boundaries of a Borough street. Am I still responsible for these sections?

A: Yes. If a lateral crosses an adjoining private parcel, an easement should have been recorded on the deeds to both parcels. Unfortunately, many of the homes on the Borough were constructed before the recording of such easements was common practices. If a lateral defect is located within a street, the property owner is required to complete the necessary repairs and resurface the damaged section of roadway.

15) **Q:** I have water line insurance through Pennsylvania American Water. Can I file a claim for sewer lateral defects?

A: It depends on the scope of the defects. Pennsylvania American Water will cover flaws that can impact service performance, such as roof intrusion and obstructions. However, the insurance generally is not valid for the remediation of cracks in the structure of the pipe. Consult with this utility before having a private plumber make repairs.