

# Planning for Adequate Sewage Disposal

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As a member of the city administration of Elkhart, I feel a pressing responsibility in providing post-war work to help take up the slack caused by the reconversion from war effort to the normal manufacturing of civilian goods and the normal pursuit of business and happiness.

As city engineer, I have been embarrassed many times by inquiries as to the size of sewers in certain sections of Elkhart suitable for factory location, when the answer was, "There is no sewer available." To inquiries from residents without a sewer as to how to obtain one, the answer was, "The topography of the land is such that the elevation of the present sewer nearest to you to which a local sewer could be extended is so high that it cannot be extended any further and still be of sufficient depth to do any good."

Much of the controversial area that I have just mentioned was acquired by the city in 1928 by an ordinance extending the boundaries of the city, and the old sewer system was not planned to serve this area. So in planning a sewage-treatment plant, with its necessary interceptors, it was necessary to include new trunk-line sewers to serve the territories not otherwise capable of being served with sanitary sewers.

As a member of the city administration, I am relieved that our community has a post-war planning fund of \$100,000 for this sewer program. No doubt you gentlemen are more interested in how we obtained this sizable nest egg than in why we needed it, or what we are going to do with it. In order to give you a well-rounded but brief picture, I will review the situation.

With basements in some sections being flooded much too often and other sections lacking any sewage facilities, it was obvious that something should be done. Everyone was for the project so long as it was not a special-assessment cost to the district served or to a district which once had paid a sewer assessment.

And then it happened! A large, well-known firm would locate in Elkhart if a public sewer were available along any street on which the chosen site abutted. Then almost simultaneously came an order from the Stream Pollution Control Board to build a sewage-treatment plant. It seems that our downstream neighbors on the beautiful St. Joe

River objected to our gratuitous contribution to the depreciation of their river-frontage real estate, to say nothing of the polio potentiality of a stream carrying considerable quantities of untreated sewage.

Without digressing into a maze of legality, may I merely state that we were told that this order might be a blessing in disguise? We are going to have a sewage-treatment plant. Sewers are a necessity to convey the sewage to the treatment plant; therefore, if we must have new sewers, why not make them of adequate capacity?

With our destination determined, we sought the co-operation of the Post-war Planning Committee of Elkhart, of representatives of the Chamber of Commerce, CIO, A. F. of L., U.M.W., J.A.C. and other interested groups. Statistics were furnished to this committee concerning the available factory sites that were not properly served by sewers. The law concerning the erection of sewage-treatment plants and sewers was digested and presented to them, as well as the act concerning the creation of the Indiana Economic Council and the Federal Works Administration. Unanimously this Committee voted to support the entire project as outlined; and as concrete evidence of such support they circulated the statutory petitions addressed to the Common Council, asking that the Council take such action as would be necessary to issue revenue bonds to pay for the construction of the project and all other steps they deemed advisable.

In the meantime I, personally, notified several consulting engineers that such a project was contemplated and arranged to have them interviewed, first by the Board of Public Works and then by the Council. A contract between the chosen firm and the Board was executed. This contract provided that the firm would furnish a preliminary survey for a stipulated amount, which amount would be credited against the fees that were to be provided when the project was completely engineered.

Before entering into this contract, we had received an estimate of the total engineering cost—approximately \$100,000—and the City Attorney had applied for that amount, both to the Indiana Economic Council and the F.W.A. The City Council ratified the contract with the engineering firm for a preliminary survey, and we were ready to begin operations.

Our first step was to file supplementary data with both lending agencies, stressing the urgency of our need and the sound economic reasons underlying our application, i.e., the increase in real estate value, the possibility for industrial growth, and above all, the absolute necessity of considering the sewers and treatment plant as one and indivisible.

Again it was necessary to have the Common Council pass a resolution. This resolution reviewed the steps that had been taken to the

date of its passage, ratified the applications by the Board, empowered the Mayor to receipt for the money and sign whatever evidences of indebtedness were necessary. Certified copies of this resolution were forwarded to both the agencies, and a note payable to the State of Indiana was executed by the Mayor under the authority of the resolution. In less than a week from that action we had received the allotment from the Auditor of State, and in the very next mail the F.W.A. paid its first of two installments. We were granted \$60,000 from the State and \$40,000 from the Federal Government, giving us our entire engineering cost.

We now propose to pass an ordinance authorizing the issuance of the total amount of revenue bonds in amounts possibly of a quarter to a half million dollars at a time, as the work progresses.

When the final bonds are sold, our loans will be retired and our post-war project will be a reality, contributing its share to the new and better Elkhart in what we hope will be a new and brighter world.

In review, these steps, as I have mentioned them, seem to suffer from over-simplification. Let me assure you that they represent the earnest, unqualified co-operative efforts of everyone in the administration, together with the public-spirited civic organizations, and, outside our community, Raymond L. Pike, formerly of the Indiana Economic Council and now with the Community Facilities Bureau of the Federal Works Administration. Without Mr. Pike's charting of the pitfalls, the task would have been an impossible one. Then there is his successor, Mr. Schellie, who took over without causing a single delay.

I am looking forward to the proposed project with mingled emotions. It has been a lot of hard work finding the wherewithal that will be the means of increasing my work and responsibilities a hundredfold; but I am satisfied that the happiness that I will receive in being a small part in an infinitesimal portion of rebuilding a new world will overshadow my grief, and I am confident that everyone of you feel that same way.