

# COUNCIL REPORT

Report Date:November 19, 2024Contact:Amy SidwellContact No.:604.871.6069RTS No.:16421VanRIMS No.:08-2000-20Meeting Date:December 3, 2024Submit comments to Council

TO:	Vancouver	City	Council
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FROM: General Manager of Engineering Services

SUBJECT: 2025 Annual Review of Sewer Rates – Sewer and Watercourse By-law

#### Recommendations

- A. THAT Council approve, in principle, proposed amendments to the Sewer and Watercourse By-law, generally as set out in this report and in Appendix A, including the establishment of 2025 rates and fees.
- B. THAT Council approve, in principle, proposed amendments to clarify that the sewer connection application fee is non-refundable.
- C. THAT Council approve, in principle, proposed amendments to the criteria for re-use of an existing sewer connection.
- D. THAT Council approve, in principle, the proposed increase to the renovation value that triggers the need for new service connections.
- E. THAT Council instruct the Director of Legal Services to bring forward for enactment the necessary amendments to the Sewer and Watercourse By-law, generally as set out in Appendix B.

## Purpose and Executive Summary

This report seeks Council approval of the recommended 2025 Sewer Utility customer rates and fees, as well as minor amendments to the Sewer and Watercourse By-law.

Staff recommend a 37% increase to sewer utility rates and 12% increase to sewer connection fees. The large increase to sewer utility rates is chiefly driven by a 48.4% increase to the Metro Vancouver sewer levy which is intended to pay for Phase 1 of the Iona Island Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrade and the North Shore Wastewater Treatment Plant. The remaining

increase is driven by the City's capital and operating costs aimed at accelerating the pace of renewal of aging infrastructure, reducing combined sewer overflows, and flood prevention.

The proposed increase of 12% for sewer connection rates reflects actual cost increases associated with labour and materials faced by the connections program.

# **Council Authority/Previous Decisions**

Sewer user and public sewer connection fees are reviewed annually by Council to establish the following year's rates.

On April 4, 2000, Council approved the implementation of user fees for sewer services to fund the operating portion of the sewer costs, based on volume.

In December 2008, Council approved shifting the remainder of the sanitary sewer costs (the infrastructure costs) from general taxes to payment through user fees. This shift was implemented over two (2) years and was complete in 2010. Currently, only the allocated costs for the storm system costs are funded by property taxes.

In May 2020, Council directed staff to develop a comprehensive sewage and rainwater management plan (now called the "Healthy Waters Plan") to guide the long-range infrastructure investments, policies, programs, and partner collaboration.

# **City Manager's Comments**

The City Manager concurs with the foregoing recommendations.

# **Context and Background**

The City of Vancouver's sewer system provides essential sewer and drainage services that protect public health, the environment, and property through the collection, conveyance, and management of sanitary water and rainwater.

The City's sewer system has a replacement value of approximately \$10.4 billion and consists of approximately 2,149 km of sewer mains, 93,000 service connections, 40,000 catch basins and 24 pump stations, which work together to convey sanitary flow (wastewater from homes and businesses) and storm water (surface run-off from private and public property and groundwater) to regional treatment facilities operated by Metro Vancouver and to the receiving environment respectively.

The main costs of running the system include the capital costs for renewing and upgrading the system and separating combined sewers, the costs to operate and maintain the system, and the cost of conveyance and treatment of liquid waste by Metro Vancouver. Utility rates cover the costs associated with the sanitary sewer system, while the drainage system is funded through property taxes.

## Discussion

The City's sewer infrastructure was built over a period of 100+ years and is deteriorating at a more rapid rate than sewer renewal investments can keep up with, resulting in a growing inventory of sewer assets in poor and very poor condition. The increasing gap between deterioration and renewal rates increases sewer back-up and flooding risk, financial, environmental regulatory compliance, and public health risks to the City and the community. Specifically, over the coming 30 years, a larger portion of the City's sewer system will be reaching end of useful life requiring increased investments in renewal. Additionally, population growth and climate change are resulting in more sewer flows which may necessitate sewer upgrades prior to the end of an asset's useful life.

These increased demands result in significant costs to the City, and require integrated planning, data-driven analysis, and structured decision-making frameworks that balance risk and levels of service. Several longer-term strategy direction documents including the ongoing Healthy Waters Plan, the Rain City Strategy, the Vancouver Plan, and departmental Asset Management Plans assist the City in strategically optimizing investments and interventions to balance affordability, sustainability, and optimal service levels.

#### Proposed Amendments to the Sewer and Watercourse By-law

Minor amendments to the Sewer and Watercourse By-law have been proposed relating to the sewer connection administration fee, re-use of existing sewer connections and the renovation threshold trigger for new service connections.

#### Sewer Connection Administration Fee

An applicant is charged a 10% application fee upon application for a sewer connection permit, with the remaining amount due upon permit issuance. This fee is non-refundable but is not explicitly stated in the By-law. The proposed amendment will address this gap and clearly state that the application fee is non-refundable.

## Use of Existing Public Sewer Connections

The Sewer and Watercourse By-law does not currently list the criteria used to determine when an existing sewer connection is suitable for re-use, resulting in questions from applicants and delays in issuing permits. The proposed amendments provide requirements that must be met for re-use, including the need to provide a video inspection of the existing connection by a certified contractor to confirm it is in good condition.

## Renovation Value Trigger for New Service Connections

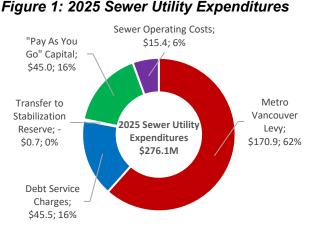
As part of the Permit Improvement Framework, the renovation value that triggers the requirement for new service connections was increased from \$95,000 to \$250,000 as of January 1, 2024. The intent is to increase this value with inflation; therefore, Staff recommend that the value be increased by 2% to \$255,000 for 2025.

# **Financial Implications**

## **Key Cost Drivers**

Sewer utility expenditures consist of four key cost drivers, as shown in Figure 1 (\$ in millions).

- Metro Vancouver levy = \$170.9 million
- Capital expenditures and debt = \$90.5 million
- Operating and maintenance = \$15.4 million
- Transfers to or from the stabilization reserve = (\$0.7 million)



## Metro Vancouver Sewer Levy

Metro Vancouver imposes an annual levy on each of its member municipalities to cover the cost of implementing and operating regional collection systems and sewage treatment facilities. The levy is a fixed amount based on operating and capital budgets in each of the sewerage areas in the region. In 2025, the current year levy will increase by 48.4% to help cover costs associated with the Phase 1 of the Iona Wastewater Treatment Plant Upgrades and the North Shore Wastewater Treatment Plant. The levy constitutes 62% of the City's total anticipated sewer utility expenditures in 2025.

## Sewer Capital Program

The sewer capital program includes renewal and upgrade of the City's pipe system and pump stations and the connection of new properties to the sewer system. It has historically been funded through debentures. In 2015, the City instituted a pay-as-you-go contribution towards capital expenditures on the sanitary sewer system. Pay-as-you-go uses current year revenues to fund current year and ongoing capital investments, ensuring the City's borrowing capacity is preserved for important one-time capital investments that are not appropriate for or too costly to be funded on a pay-as-you-go basis.

This pay-as-you-go contribution was \$37.5 million in 2024 and is proposed to increase to \$45.0 million for 2025. This increase is needed to help achieve an asset renewal rate of >1%, so as to allow the City to meet its regulatory obligations and fund system renewal capital work associated with the 2023-2026 Capital Plan.

## **Operating and Maintenance**

Sewer operating and maintenance costs are associated with cleaning, repairing, inspecting, and managing the infrastructure, as well as emergency response for sewer backups and flooding.

#### 2025 Proposed Budget and Rates

Sewer utility rates are proposed to increase by 37.0%. This change is overwhelmingly due to an increase of 48.4% to the Metro Vancouver sewer levy. The increase in Metro levy accounts for approximately 30% out of the 37% increase in the City's sewer utility rate. The increased payas-you-go contribution for the City's sewer capital program is also a factor.

The draft 2025 budget is summarized in Table 1 with the 2024 budget for comparison.

Sewer Utility (\$ millions)	2024 Budget	2025 Proposed	ange from 24 Budget	% Change
Water Consumption Volume	110,000,000	109,500,000	L-Puuber	
Revenues				
General Tax Levy	\$ 57.4	\$ 63.1	\$ 5.7	9.9%
Metered Rate Revenues	93.8	126.9	33.1	35.3%
Flat Rate Revenues	60.2	83.7	23.5	39.0%
Industrial Waste Water Fees	1.1	1.3	0.2	14.6%
Other Revenues	2.0	1.1	(0.9)	-43.8%
Total Revenues	\$ 214.5	\$ 276.1	\$ 61.5	28.79
GVSⅅ Levy	\$ 115.2	\$ 170.9	\$ 55.7	48.49
Sewers Operating Costs	15.6	15.4	(0.2)	-1.29
Debt Service Charges	43.5	45.5	2.0	4.69
Transfer to/(from) Stabilization Reserve	2.8	(0.7)	(3.5)	125.49
"Pay as you Go" Capital	37.5	45.0	7.5	20.09
Total Expenditures & Transfers	\$ 214.5	\$ 276.1	\$ 61.5	28.7%
Surplus/(Deficit)	\$ 	\$ -	\$ 	0.0%

# Table 1 – Draft 2025 Budget

Table may not sum due to rounding.

## 2025 Revenues and Proposed Rates

Metered rate revenue will increase by \$33.1 million and flat rate revenue will increase by \$23.5 million, primarily as a result of a 48.4% increase in the Metro Vancouver sewer levy. Industrial wastewater fees will increase commensurate with historical rate increases. The reduction in other revenues is due to a reclassification of cost-reducing recoveries related to catch-basin cleaning from revenues to expenditures.

The \$5.7 million increase in the General Tax Levy allocated to the Sewer Utility is result of the increased cost of the storm water component of the sewer system. The storm water component of the sewer system constitutes about 23% of the total cost of the Sewer Utility, and its costs are driven by the same factors as those influencing the overall utility – primarily increased levies from Metro Vancouver. For 2025, the increased cost of the storm water component of the sewer system will result in an additional 0.5% property tax increase, which has been built into the draft 2025 non-utility budget.

#### 2025 Expenditure & Transfers

The 2025 budget for Metro Vancouver charges will increase by 48.4% over the 2024 budget. The reduction in operating costs reflects the \$0.7 million reclassification of cost-reducing recoveries, which is partly offset by an increase in remaining operating costs of \$0.5 million (itself the result of collective agreement settlements). Debt charges (interest and principal combined) will increase by \$2.0 million. The pay-as-you-go capital contribution will increase by \$7.5 million to meet asset renewal goals. The transfer to the rate stabilization reserve will decrease by \$3.5 million as a result.

# **Five Year Outlook**

Table 2 summarizes the five-year rate outlook for the Sewer Utility. Only the 2025 rate increase is to be approved by Council; future year increases are provided for information only. The primary driver of Sewer Utility rate increases will be Metro Vancouver's decisions about levy increases; the information below is based on the most recent Metro Vancouver rate forecasts. Future rates will also depend on future capital plan decisions and cost inflation, which are uncertain. As noted in previously in this report, renewal of aging infrastructure regionally, as well as other factors such as population growth and climate change, will put upward pressure on long-term Sewer Utility rates.

## Table 2 – Sewer Utility Rate Outlook 2025-2029

Sewer Utility Rate Forecast	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029
Metro Rate Increase	48.4%	11.6%	9.2%	7.9%	11.0%
Proposed City Metered Rate Increase	37.0%	7.0%	6.0%	6.0%	8.0%

## Related Fees

These fees are for discharges of contaminated groundwater and ship wastewater as well as by third-party utilities. Staff recommend an 37.0% increase in rates to these fees to recover program costs.

## **Connection Fees**

All new development and major renovation projects in the City are required to install separated sewer connections on private property and pay connection fees for the corresponding connections on City property. These fees are updated regularly to ensure cost recovery. To compensate for increases in construction costs incurred, staff recommend a 12.0% increase in flat-rate connection and inspection fees.

## Legal Implications

The proposed amendments to the Sewer and Watercourse By-law are contained in Appendix B, and a red-lined version of the miscellaneous amendments is provided in Appendix C.

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Schedule A

#### Appendix A Sewer & Watercourse By-law No. 8093 2025 Rate Changes

Part I: Sewer Connection Flat Rates	2024	Proposed 2025	% Increase
<ol> <li>Public Sewer Connection, for One-Family or Two-Family Dwellings (including 3 inch/75 mm diameter and greater pressure connections)</li> </ol>	\$16,669	\$18,669	12.0%
2. Public Sewer Connection, other than One-Family or Two-Family Dwellings			
a) 4 inch/100 mm diameter	\$24,408	\$27,337	12.0%
b) 6 inch/150 mm diameter	\$29,460	\$32,995	12.0%
c) 8 inch/200 mm diameter	\$33,328	\$37,327	12.0%
d) 10 inch/250 mm diameter	\$38,446	\$43,060	12.0%
e) 12 inch/300 mm diameter	\$43,684	\$48,926	12.0%
f) 15 inch/375 mm diameter	\$48,852	\$54,714	12.0%
g) Connection to building sewer where installation cost is greater than 1.5 times the applicable flat rate	340,0JZ	\$34,714	12.078
connection fee set out in this Schedule	At Cost pursua	int to Section 2.7 (2	)
<ul> <li>h) Maintenance hole installation in conjunction with a public sewer connection pursuant to Section 2.7 (3) of Sewer and Watercourse By-law</li> </ul>	At Cost pursua	int to Section 2.7 (3)	)
3. Where a public sewer connection will be placed more than 5 feet below the ground elevation, taken to the nearest foot and measured at the centre line of the street or lane as determined by the City Engineer, the fee			
payable shall be an amount equivalent to an increase of 10%, for each additional foot below 5 feet, of the fee otherwise payable by section 1 or 2 above.			
4. New fitting on a twin sewer pursuant to Section 2.7 (4)	\$7,458	\$8,353	12.0%
5. New fitting on a single sewer pursuant to Section 2.7 (4)	\$3,288	\$3,683	12.0%
6. Inspection of a plumbing system, subsoil drainage pipes and a building sewer	\$451	\$505	12.0%
Part III: Flat Rates for Unmetered Property			
	2024	Proposed 2025	% Increase
Single Family Dwelling	\$856	\$1,173	37.0%
Single Family Dwelling with Suite	\$1,156	\$1,584	37.0%
Single Family Dwelling with Laneway House	\$1,156	\$1,584	37.0%
Single Family Dwelling with Suite and Laneway House	\$1,456	\$1,995	37.0% 37.0%
Strata Duplex (per dwelling unit)	\$579 \$1,711	\$793	37.0%
2 Services, 1 Lot 3 Services, 1 Lot	\$1,711 \$2,564	\$2,344 \$3,513	37.0%
4 Services, 1 Lot	\$2,504	\$4,688	37.0%
Parking Lot/Garden	\$3,422 \$489	\$670	37.0%
Part IV: Flat Rates for Other Property or Shut Off Water Service			
	2024	Proposed 2025	% Increase
Other Property	\$386	\$529	37.0%
Turned Off, 1 Service	\$386	\$529	37.0%
Turned Off, 2 Services	\$386	\$529	37.0%
Turned Off, 3 Services	\$386	\$529	37.0%
Part V: Unit-Based Rates for Metered Property	2024	D 10005	A( 1
Matarad Dranatty Data	2024	Proposed 2025	% Increase
Metered Property Rate Waste Discharge Permit User Rate	\$5.507 \$1.814	\$7.545 \$2.485	37.0% 37.0%
Part VI: Flat Rate for Specific Types of Discharges/Disposals			
· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·	2024	Proposed 2025	% Increase
For the discharge of contaminated groundwater pursuant to Section 7.11 (per cubic metre)	\$1.98	\$2.71	37.0%
For the disposal of ship wastewater pursuant to Section 7.12 (per cubic metre)	\$1.98	\$2.71	37.0%
For discharges by Utilities pursuant to Section 7.13 (per maintenance hole connected)	\$522	\$715	37.0%

#### APPENDIX B

## DRAFT By-law to amend Sewer and Watercourse By-law No. 8093

#### regarding 2025 fee increases and other miscellaneous amendments

Note: A By-law will be prepared generally in accordance with the provisions listed below, subject to change and refinement prior to posting.

1. This by-law amends the indicated provisions of Sewer and Watercourse By-law No. 8093.

- 2. In section 2.2(b), Council strikes out "\$250,000" and substitutes "\$255,000".
- 3. In section 2.7, Council:
  - (a) strikes out (7.1);
  - (b) renumbers (7.2) as (7); and
  - (c) in (7), adds ", except that the refund may not include any portion of the non-refundable application fee paid" after "as is recommended by the City Engineer".
- 4. Council strikes out subsection 2.9 (1) and substitutes the following:
  - "(1.1) Upon application, the City Engineer may approve the use of an existing public sewer connection if the sewer connection is:
    - (a) sized adequately;
    - (b) not a combined connection;
    - (c) made of PVC or, if the sewer connection is larger than 375 mm, of concrete;
    - (d) in good condition and the City Engineer is satisfied that it is suitable for continued use; and
    - (e) meets all of the other requirements of this By-law.
  - (1.2) When applying for the use of an existing public sewer connection under Sentence (1.1) above, the applicant must provide a video inspection and associated inspection report from a PACP/LACP certified contractor for the City Engineer's review in order for the City Engineer to verify the condition of the sewer connection, and if the City Engineer determines that the connection contains defects or deficiencies, the sewer connection may be deemed unsuitable.".

5. In section 2.9(2), Council strikes out "Sentence (1)" wherever it appears, and substitutes "Sentence (1.1)".

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6. Council repeals Parts I, III, IV, V, and VI of Schedule A to the Sewer and Watercourse Bylaw, and substitutes:

#### **"PART I**

## SEWER CONNECTION RATES

Every applicant for a public sewer connection must pay to the City the applicable sewer connection rates set out below, payable as follows:

- (a) a non-refundable application fee of 10% of the applicable rates set out below in sections 1, 2(a) through (f), and 6, at the time of application, and
- (b) the remaining amount when invoiced by the City, prior to permit issuance.

1.	Lar	blic sewer connection, for Single Detached House with or without neway House, or Duplex (including 3 inch/75mm and greater essure connections)	\$18,669.00
2.		blic sewer connection, other than Single Detached House or plex	
	a)	4 inch/100 mm diameter	\$27,337.00
	b)	6 inch/150 mm diameter	\$32,995.00
	c)	8 inch/200 mm diameter	\$37,327.00
	d)	10 inch/250 mm diameter	\$43,060.00
	e)	12 inch/300 mm diameter	\$48,926.00
	f)	15 inch/375 mm diameter or greater	\$54,714.00
	g)	connection to building sewer where installation cost is greater than 1.5 times the applicable flat rate connection fee set out in this Schedule	At cost, pursuant to Section 2.7(2)
	h)	maintenance hole installation in conjunction with a public sewer connection pursuant to Section 2.7(3) of Sewer and Watercourse By-law	At cost, pursuant to Section 2.7(3)
3.		Where a public sewer connection will be placed more than 5 feet below the ground elevation, taken to the nearest foot and measured at the centre line of the street or lane, as determined by the City Engineer, the fees payable shall be an amount equivalent to an increase of 10% for each additional foot below 5 feet, of the fee otherwise payable by section 1 or 2 above	
4.		New fitting on a twin sewer pursuant to Section 2.7(4)	\$8,353.00

5.	New fitting on a single sewer pursuant to Section 2.7(4)	
6.	Inspection of a plumbing system, subsoil drainage pipes, and a building sewer	\$505.00

# PART III

# FLAT RATES FOR UNMETERED PROPERTY

Single Detached House	\$1,173.00
Single Detached House with Secondary Suite	\$1,584.00
Single Detached House with either Laneway House or Infill Single Detached House	\$1,584.00
Single Detached House with Secondary Suite and either Laneway House or Infill Single Detached House	\$1,995.00
Strata Duplex (per dwelling unit)	\$793.00
2 Services, 1 Lot	\$2,344.00
3 Services, 1 Lot	\$3,513.00
4 Services, 1 Lot	\$4,688.00
Parking Lot/Garden	\$670.00

## PART IV

## FLAT RATES FOR OTHER PROPERTY OR SHUT OFF WATER SERVICE

Other Property	\$529.00
Turned Off, 1 Service	\$529.00
Turned Off, 2 Services	\$529.00
Turned Off, 3 Services	\$529.00

# PART V

# UNIT-BASED RATES FOR METERED PROPERTY

Metered Property Rate	\$7.545
Waste Discharge Permit User Rate	\$2.485

## PART VI

## FLAT RATE FOR SPECIFIC TYPES OF DISCHARGES/DISPOSALS

For the discharge of contaminated groundwater, pursuant to Section 7.11 (per cubic metre)	\$2.71
For the disposal of ship wastewater, pursuant to Section 7.12 (per cubic metre)	\$2.71
For discharges by Utilities, pursuant to Section 7.13 (per maintenance hole connected)	\$715.00

7. A decision by a court that any part of this By-law is illegal, void, or unenforceable severs that part from this By-law, and is not to affect the balance of this By-law.

8. This By-law is to come into force and take effect on January 1, 2025.

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ENACTED by Council this day of , 2024

Mayor

City Clerk

# APPENDIX C

#### Proposed Amendments to Sewer and Watercourse By-law No. 8093

This document is being provided for information only as a reference tool to highlight the proposed amendments. The draft amending by-laws attached to the Council report RTS No. 16421 entitled "2025 Annual Review of Sewer Rates – Sewer and Watercourse By-law" represent the amendments being proposed to Council for approval. Should there be any discrepancy between this redline version and the draft amending by-laws, the draft amending by-laws prevail.

# 2.2 NEW PUBLIC SEWER CONNECTION FOR CONSTRUCTION

Subject to Section 2.9, a new public sewer connection is required whenever:

- (a) A new house of building is constructed; or
- (b) An existing house or building is renovated and the estimated construction value ius more than \$250,000 \$255,000, and the work involves:
  - (i) The addition of a dwelling unit, or
  - (ii) The enlargement of, or a change of use within, an existing commercial space that is expected to increase demand upon the existing sewer system.

## 2.7 FEES FOR SEWER CONNECTION

- (7.1) Where an application for a connection permit has been submitted but a permit has not yet been issued, an applicant may withdraw their application and request a refund of a portion of the application fee paid, and where the City Engineer recommends the refund, the Collector may refund to the applicant such part of the application fee paid as is recommended by the City Engineer.
- (7.2)-(7) Where a permit has been issued but the City has not yet commenced the work specified by the permit, a permit holder may apply in writing to the City Engineer for cancellation of the permit and a refund of a portion of the fees paid, and where the City Engineer recommends the refund and certifies that the work has not been commenced and the permit has been cancelled, the Collector may refund to the permit holder such part of the fees paid as is recommended by the City Engineer except that the refund may not include any portion of the non-refundable application fee paid.

#### 2.9 USE OF EXISTING PUBLIC SEWER CONNECTION

- (1) Upon application, the City Engineer may approve the use of an existing public sewer connection that was installed in 1985 or thereafter and which is not a combined connection provided that it meets the other requirements of this By-law and the City Engineer is satisfied that it is suitable for continued use.
- (1.1) Upon application, the City Engineer may approve the use of an existing public sewer connection if the sewer connection is:
  - (a) sized adequately;
  - (b) not a combined connection;
  - (c) made of PVC or, if the sewer connection is larger than 375 mm, of concrete;
  - (d) in good condition and the City Engineer is satisfied that it is suitable for continued use;
  - (e) and meets all of the other requirements of this By-law.
- (1.2) When applying for the use of an existing public sewer connection under Sentence (1.1) above, the applicant must provide a video inspection and associated inspection report from a PACP/LACP certified contractor for the City Engineer's review in order for the City Engineer to verify the condition of the sewer connection, and if the City Engineer determines that the connection contains defects or deficiencies, the sewer connection may be deemed unsuitable.
- (2) The fee, including inspection, for the approval referred to in Sentence (1) will be:
  - (a) an amount equal to the connection fee set out in Part I of Schedule A to this Bylaw if the City has installed the existing public sewer connection referred to in Sentence (1) Sentence (1.1) but has not received payment previously of an amount equal to the connection fee then payable for that existing public sewer connection; or
  - (b) an amount equal to 20% of the connection fee set out in Part I of Schedule A to this By-law if the City has installed the existing public sewer connection referred to in Sentence (1) Sentence (1.1) and has received payment previously of an amount equal to the connection fee then payable for that existing public sewer connection.