Omaha Star Article

OMAHA, Ne (May 17, 2007) Over the past several weeks, the Omaha *Star* has been running articles about a challenge facing the city with regard to its sewer system. Omaha is among 772 cities nationwide that must develop a long-range plan to prevent waste water from overflowing into area streams and rivers. An overflow, called a CSO, happens during rainfalls when storm water enters the sewer system along with sanitary waste and the capacity of the system is inadequate to handle it.

At public meetings to be held this evening at Lewis and Clark Middle School and Tuesday, May 22, at South High School, city administrators will update residents on the progress engineering firms have made in identifying solutions that will meet federally mandated water quality requirements while at the same time taking into consideration community concerns.

The affected area, located between 72nd Street and the Missouri River, I-680 to Harrison Street, was divided into ten basin areas to determine how best to manage the problem. More than 140 volunteers representing various community groups and neighborhoods have worked with engineers and city officials to develop ways to solve the problem taking into consideration the regulatory requirements, how much the project will cost and the impact it will have on the community. Of the 10 basin areas, five of them include parts of North Omaha. They are Bridge Street, Cole Creek, Minne Lusa, Burt Izard and Saddle Creek.

Alternatives presented to the individual basin areas range from total sewer separation to storage tanks that will store the sewage and storm water runoff during a rainfall, releasing it after the storm at a rate the treatment plants can handle it, to building small treatment plants in the basin which will separate solid waste from liquid and disinfecting it before releasing it. It is widely anticipated that a combination of these alternatives will be used. Engineers and Basin Advisory Panel members are working together to select alternatives that meet eight criteria established for all the basins. Those criteria include water quality improvement, reduction of combined sewer back-ups into basements, reduction of street flooding, minimizing community disruption, simplicity of solutions, opportunities for infrastructure/utility improvements, compatibility with the community and opportunities for community enhancements.

For example, in the Minne Lusa basin, advisory panel members told engineers that they wanted to see a reduction of combined sewer back-ups and utility improvements as part of the alternatives chosen to solve the water quality issue. As a result, engineers have come up with four ideas that could meet the water quality standards as well as solve the problem of sewer back-ups in the neighborhood. Over the course of the next few months, additional work will be done to determine which course of action meets those requirements and is most cost effective.

The same process has been repeated in each of the basins and work will continue until the preliminary plan is presented to regulatory officials in October. Once the

preliminary plan is accepted, additional work will be done over the course of the next two years as a final plan is developed, presented and accepted. Construction is expected to begin in 2009 and could take up to 15 years. During that time the city will continue working on separate sewer projects as needed.

Public meetings outlining the preliminary results for all the basins will be held this evening beginning at 6:30 p.m. at Lewis and Clark Middle School, located at 6901 Burt Street with an identical presentation scheduled for Tuesday, May 22, 2007 at South High School, 4519 South 24th Street, also beginning at 6:30 p.m.