



## How to Proceed and Costs Involved

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Dear Reader:

The following document was created from the MTAS website ([mtas.tennessee.edu](https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu)). This website is maintained daily by MTAS staff and seeks to represent the most current information regarding issues relative to Tennessee municipal government.

We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with municipal government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other MTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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## How to Proceed and Costs Involved

**Reference Number:** MTAS-804

### ***How to Proceed***

- Retain an engineering firm to propose viable alternatives and cost estimates.
- Be in charge. Don't turn the project over entirely to your engineer. Appoint a champion — a person or committee who will coordinate the project, devote time to it and promote it.
- Get buy-in from as many local groups and citizens as possible. Develop a consistent message about why you are doing this.
- Ask for free help from state agencies. Check out cities that have been through this process, and talk to them and learn from their mistakes.
- Have realistic expectations. Keep your eyes wide open. Don't get tunnel vision by listening to one way of doing things and thus not considering other options. Check out everything.
- Organize. Have a written list of action steps and concrete plans. Work your plan, but stay loose and flexible.
- Keep excellent detailed records of all contacts, costs, etc.

### ***How Much Will it Cost?***

Probably far more than anyone initially thought. Be cautious comparing your expectations. The sewer bills for new systems are often far higher than those of an old established system. The single most important factor in the costs will be the infrastructure installation followed by the quality of system management. There usually are many different methods that a city can choose from to provide sewer service, for instance, the city could:

- Build collection lines and a discharging plant;
- Build collection lines and a non-discharging treatment system such as a drip field discharge (originally applied only to small systems or subdivisions but increasingly is used for larger systems including some small cities);
- Build collection lines and a trunk line to another city and discharge into a neighboring city's system;
- Allow a neighboring city to build collection mains within your city limits. The neighboring city would "own" all the system and serve customers directly. Your city would have no vested interest in the sewer system, but could benefit from the growth that will occur; or
- Allow a private company to build and operate a sewer system within your city limits.

### ***When?***

- Set goals and deadlines for when certain actions must occur. This will require close communication with other parties involved in the project. Don't get into a situation where you have to make crisis decisions. Allow enough time to think things through and get the information you need to make good decisions. Make sure you understand the financial consequences of your decisions.
- If seeking grants, become aware of application deadlines.
- A note about grant funded projects. The infrastructure constructed with grant funds must be depreciated and rates must cover that depreciation.

### ***Where?***

- Phasing in sewer systems may make sense for your city especially if houses are widely dispersed. Again, know WHY you are installing sewers.
- Start with areas of greatest need. Plan and budget to add other areas later.

### ***Who?***

Again, appoint a spokesman or committee who will commit the time and effort it will take to make this

project successful. Consider the skills needed — good communication skills, organizational capabilities, etc.

See Steps to a Successful Utility Construction Project [1] for more information on this topic.

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**Links:**

[1] <https://www.mtas.tennessee.edu/reference/steps-successful-construction-project>

*DISCLAIMER: The letters and publications written by the MTAS consultants were written based upon the law at the time and/or a specific sets of facts. The laws referenced in the letters and publications may have changed and/or the technical advice provided may not be applicable to your city or circumstances. Always consult with your city attorney or an MTAS consultant before taking any action based on information contained in this website.*

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