Frequently Asked Questions

About the Program

1. What is the purpose of the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility new septic tank phase out program?

One of the primary purposes of the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility (JSU) is to improve the environment and to achieve and maintain compliance with state and federal stormwater management requirements. Under an agreement with the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP), the city is responsible for removing a significant amount of nutrients from the St. Johns River and its tributaries, collectively known as “surface waters.” Science has shown that septic tanks on properties with very specific conditions are a contributor of the nutrients the city is obligated to remove – even if the septic tanks are functioning properly. FDEP has agreed to allow the city to use the FDEP scientific model to evaluate properties with the appropriate conditions for water quality improvements through septic tank removal.

The benefits of participating in this new program include the installation of a new sewer pipe on private property, proper abandonment of existing septic system(s) and payment of all associated permit and JEA capacity fees.

2. How does the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility determine what properties are eligible for this program?

This program’s sole purpose is to remove nutrients from the St. Johns River and its tributaries, collectively known as “surface waters.” For this reason, eligibility for this program is determined by the level of surface water quality improvements the city will achieve by abandoning the septic tank(s) on the property.

Not all properties on septic systems will be considered for this program; there are basic criteria that properties must meet to be considered for further evaluation, such as proximity to water and availability of sanitary sewer. Ultimately, a property’s eligibility is determined by the results of analysis through a complex scientific model developed by the Florida Department of Environmental Protection (FDEP). Because the nutrient reduction is dependent on specific conditions and circumstances of individual sites, it is possible that one property will be eligible but adjacent properties are not.

3. How can other property owners find out if their properties are eligible?

Based on the science that supports the FDEP model, we are able to identify the characteristics a property must have to warrant analysis through the model. Only properties that meet these basic conditions will be considered for further evaluation, and not all properties that meet these conditions will end up being eligible for the program.

First, the program is currently limited to properties that have existing sanitary sewer lines available for connection.

Second, properties must be in very close proximity to a natural water body (river, creek, tributary, etc.) or a municipal stormwater facility (ditch, outfall, etc.) that discharges (drains) to surface waters. Properties farther than 100 meters (328 feet) from a natural water body or qualifying municipal stormwater facility – called “receiving waters” – will not be considered.

If these first two criteria are met, program engineers will then review sources of geographic and hydrologic information to determine if the property’s physical features present the potential for nutrient reductions. Properties with certain soil types and topography allow nutrients to travel faster and easier to nearby “receiving waters,” and are therefore most likely to provide some nutrient reduction by abandoning the septic tank(s).

Property owners may call JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or e-mail projectoutreach@jea.com to request an initial evaluation, which may take up to four to six weeks to complete. Properties that do not meet each of these minimum conditions will not be considered for inclusion in this program. However, if a property meets these minimum conditions, the property will be recorded as a candidate in our program database for future analysis through the FDEP model.
4. Can I be forced to connect to the JEA sewer system if my property is eligible for this program?

Participation in the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility’s (JSU) septic tank phase out program is completely voluntary. Under this program, the JSU, in partnership with JEA, will fund the full cost of abandoning your existing septic tank(s) and connecting your waste water system to the available sanitary sewer line. Depending on the availability of funds, this program may not be available in the future for property owners who choose not to participate now.

The permitting and regulation of Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (septic tanks) is under the jurisdiction of Florida Department of Health, locally administered by the Duval County Health Department. More information about state rules and regulations governing septic systems is available online at the DOH website (www.floridahealth.gov) under the Environmental Health section.

5. What, if anything, will I pay to connect to the JEA sanitary sewer system under this program?

Property owners will not be required to pay any of the upfront costs associated with connection to the JEA sewer system. The Jacksonville Stormwater Utility is funding the costs associated with the actual construction. Working as a partner, JEA is covering the capacity fees charged to new customers prior to connection to the system in addition to project management expenses.

In order to start service, the party responsible for the monthly charges must complete an application for sewer service and pay any applicable deposit (see “About JEA Billing” Question #2 for more information on deposits). This is usually whoever is responsible for the current JEA utility bill, whether that be the property owner, tenant, or third party. The person that signs the service agreement will be the person responsible for the charges.

6. Will I have to repay the cost of construction and connection if I sell my home?

Property owners that participate in this septic tank phase out program will not have to repay any of the costs to abandon the septic tank(s) and connect to sanitary sewer.

7. Why are all properties with septic tanks not included in this project?

This program’s sole purpose is to remove nutrients from the St. Johns River and its tributaries, collectively known as “surface waters.” Science has shown that septic tanks on properties with very specific conditions contribute nutrients to our surface waters that the city is obligated to remove – even if the septic tanks are functioning properly. For this reason, eligibility for this program is determined exclusively by the degree of surface water quality improvement the city will achieve by abandoning the septic tank(s) on the property. Because nutrient reduction is dependent on very specific conditions and circumstances of individual sites, it is possible that one property will be eligible but adjacent properties are not.

8. Are commercial or non-profit properties currently included in this program?

Each property is considered on a case-by-case basis. Please contact JEA Project Outreach directly at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com if you have any questions about a specific commercial property.

9. Is there a possibility that I could be forced to connect to the sewer system in the future?

This program is solely focused on achieving surface water quality improvements through the abandonment of septic tanks. Other organizations, such as the Florida Department of Health (DOH), are responsible for septic tank regulation. More information about Onsite Sewage Treatment and Disposal Systems (septic tanks) is available online at the DOH website (www.floridahealth.gov) under the Environmental Health section.

10. How is this project different from the past septic tank phase out programs included in the River City Renaissance and Better Jacksonville Plan?

Previous septic tank phase out programs have focused on areas deemed to be a “sanitary nuisance” as defined by state law and identified by the Florida Department of Health. Generally, the target areas had a large number of failing septic tanks and were considered a hazard to human health as well as the environment. The programs extended sanitary sewer lines to areas that didn’t have them, and property owners that chose to connect had to pay to make the connection(s) or formally defer connection by demonstrating the septic system was properly functioning.

This new program is focused on improving the health of our natural waterways through the reduction of nutrients. In this program, everybody benefits: our waterways get healthier, the city meets its state-mandated obligations, and property owners can have their septic system(s) abandoned at no cost to them, which can normally range anywhere between $5,000 - $10,000 or more.
Frequently Asked Questions

About the Program – Continued

11. **If my property is found to be eligible for this program, what are the next steps I need to take to get connected? What are the specific conditions for connection?**

The Jacksonville Stormwater Utility (JSU) has partnered with JEA to facilitate the sewer connection process and construction management. All participating property owners will need to grant a Temporary Construction Easement (TCE) to allow contractors access onto private property when necessary during construction, and complete an application for JEA sewer service.

If you are interested in participating in the program, please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com to set up an informal meeting at your home or business. JEA’s Project Outreach team members will be ready to discuss the construction and connection process specific to your property. Also at that time, the TCE permit can be witnessed and notarized by a JEA notary, and the JEA sewer service application can be completed. Remember, the JEA sewer service application must be signed by the person who will be responsible for the charges and service deposit.

For properties served by a well, a separate agreement will be necessary for JEA to place a meter on the well *only to gauge water usage in your sewer*. You will not have to connect to JEA water if it is available.

Property owners may choose to have the required documents witnessed and notarized independently of JEA. If you are interested in this option, please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com.

All costs associated with the notary and mailing will be the responsibility of the homeowner. Please send the completed, notarized documents to the following mailing address:

JEA Project Outreach
21 West Church Street
Tower 7
Jacksonville, FL 32202

12. **What happens if don’t connect now, but may want to in the future? Am I still eligible?**

Currently, there is no defined expiration date on eligibility. However, it is possible that the program goals and/or eligibility requirements may change in the future.

13. **Will the Jacksonville Stormwater Utility consider expanding this septic tank phase out program to areas without JEA sewer?**

Currently, the focus of this program is limited to properties with septic tanks with existing sanitary sewer available for connection. It is possible that a future phase of this program will include construction of new sewer lines, but there are no definitive plans or schedule at this time.

14. **Who can I contact with any additional questions regarding the program?**

If you have any further questions regarding this program, please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com.

Property owners can also visit the project website located at [http://jea.com/septic-tank](http://jea.com/septic-tank) for updated information and to review the documents (TCE, JEA service application) required for connection to the system.
About Construction

1. Who will be managing the construction and completing the connection to my home?
   JEA will be responsible for contracting with certified plumbers and contractors, as well as managing the day to day construction activities. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the construction, please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com.

   JEA contractors will perform the connection work for those owners that agree to the program requirements. To participate in this no cost connection program, property owners will need to complete a temporary construction easement (TCE) to allow access onto your property for planning and actual connection activities.

2. What work will be required to connect my home to the sewer system?
   The connection requirements for each property may be different. First, JEA must verify that there is currently an existing sewer tap for each property. If there is not an existing tap, JEA will install a new tap, which is usually located within the City of Jacksonville right of way closest to your property line.

   Once the tap has been established, a certified plumber under contract and managed by JEA, will properly abandon each septic tank (some structures have more than one). The plumber or contractor will pump out, puncture and fill each septic tank with clean sand. The plumber will then connect your property from the sewer tap to the connection point on the structure.

   JEA will be required to install a water meter on any properties that are currently served by a private well. This meter is required for sewer billing purposes and will only measure what water is being sent into our system to be treated. Existing JEA water customers will be billed using the consumption readings from their existing water meter. There will be no cost to the property owner for any of the construction as described above.

3. How long will construction take once they start on my property?
   On average each connection should be completed within five working days of the start of construction. It is possible for the work duration to be shorter or longer depending on each individual situation.

4. Will the contractor remove the “mound” or above ground drain field and septic tank from my property?
   Removal of the tank and removal/rehabilitation of the drain field will not be in the contractor’s scope of work under this program. The septic tank will be pumped out, punctured, and filled with sand and remain in place. Property owners may choose to have their drain field and/or septic tank removed at their own cost if they so desire. Please contact the Duval County Health Department directly at (904) 630-3274 if you have any questions regarding drain field and septic tank removal.

5. What can I expect as far as restoration of the areas disturbed during construction?
   The contractor or plumber is required to return each property to its pre-construction condition following the completion of the work at each property. This includes replacing any sod, plants, driveways, sidewalks, irrigation, fencing, curbs, asphalt, etc., disturbed during construction activities.

6. Is the work completed by the certified plumbers covered by any type of warranty?
   The sewer installation work is under a warranty for one (1) year following installation. Please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com if you have any sewer problems within the warranty period. This warranty only covers the outside portion of the sewer system installed by JEA’s contractor or certified plumber, not problems or issues inside the structure.

7. Who can I contact with any questions or concerns before, during or after the project?
   The JEA Project Outreach team is ready to assist you with any questions before, during or after the construction project. Call (904) 665-7500 Monday through Friday from 8 AM to 5 PM or e-mail projectoutreach@jea.com.
Frequently Asked Questions

About JEA Billing

1. **What will I need to do to sign up for JEA sewer service?**  
   JEA will require a completed application for sewer service signed by the person that will be responsible for any applicable service deposit and payment of the monthly utility bill.

   A deposit may be required depending on the applicant’s credit score. However, if a deposit is necessary, the standard deposit minimum amount will be $75.00 for *sewer only* or $100 for *both water and sewer*. Deposits are based on two times the average water consumption at the property in question based on the historic consumption, typically the last twelve (12) months. If customers are unable to pay the upfront costs associated with the deposit, please contact JEA directly at 665-7500 and we will assist you with a payment plan option.

   JEA staff will provide the necessary application for JEA sewer service along with the Temporary Construction Easement (TCE) document required for connection. Please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or projectoutreach@jea.com if you have further questions or to set up a meeting at your property or at JEA, located at 21 W. Church Street in downtown Jacksonville.

2. **What if I am renting my property to tenants? Who would need to sign the application for sewer service?**  
   Only the property owner may elect to participate in this program and grant permission for access and construction on private property. However, the person responsible for any deposit and monthly charges will be whoever signs the JEA sewer service application, which would likely be the same person that is currently responsible for the existing JEA bill. This will be either the property owner or current tenant. The decision related to the billing of sewer (and water where applicable) should be worked out by the property owner with any current or existing tenants prior to connection to be eligible for this program. The property owner can elect to be billed for a tenant’s sewer or water/sewer service(s) if he or she so desires.

3. **How does JEA determine what to bill each property for monthly sewer service?**  
   JEA requires that a water meter be installed on the potable water service line (either private well or JEA water service) to measure the amount of water used in the household. This meter allows JEA to accurately bill sewer treatment volumes equal to your household water use.

4. **How will JEA measure my usage and bill me for sewer service if I am currently served by a private well and NOT a JEA water customer?**  
   Where household (potable) water is provided by a private well, JEA requires that a meter be installed on the potable service line to measure the amount of water used in the household. This meter allows JEA to accurately bill sewer treatment volumes equal to your household water use, similar to the way other JEA customers’ sewer bills are calculated. This also allows you to continue to use your well for irrigation and other outdoor applications without being charged for sewer treatment on that use.

About Septic Tanks

1. **How many septic tanks are there currently in Duval County?**  
   There are approximately 65,000 septic tanks in Duval County.
2. **What is the City of Jacksonville, Duval County Health Department and JEA doing to help limit the number of septic tanks installed in the future?**

JEA is committed to making sewer available on the major streets as identified in the JEA Water and Sewer Master Plan. This means targeting new developments that would normally choose septic tanks. JEA now pays for the installation of all regional water and sewer main lines as identified in the JEA Water and Sewer Master Plan. By making sewer service available on major corridors it allows new developments to connect to JEA’s system. Developers/homeowners are still responsible for the costs associated with constructing the sewer system within the neighborhood and for associated connection fees.

3. **In new neighborhoods, who pays for the installation of septic tanks?**

The homeowner ultimately pays for the installation of a septic tank. The homebuilders, or developers, initially pay for septic tank installations and then pass the costs on to homebuyers as part of the purchase price of their new homes.

4. **In new neighborhoods, why do developers sometimes install septic tanks instead of JEA sewer service?**

The developer will usually install septic tanks in cases where it is cost prohibitive to install JEA sewer service or when it is otherwise not feasible. For example, if the closest sewer system is located too far from the new development it would be so expensive, the new home prices could not bear the cost and still be marketable.

There are places where properly installed and maintained septic tank systems are acceptable and environmentally safe, but centralized sewer systems (like JEA’s sewer system) provide distinct and significant advantages over septic tank systems. Important advantages include the ability to verify by testing the effectiveness of sewer treatment for thousands of homes at a single location (the wastewater treatment plant), the production of water reuse, and advanced wastewater treatment beyond what is possible in a septic tank system.

5. **Since JEA gets the revenue from the sewer bills, why doesn't JEA pay all the costs to convert from septic tanks to JEA sewer or to build sewers in neighborhoods without sewers that are not on the Septic Tank System Failure Areas list?**

The sewer rates are not nearly enough to pay for septic tank conversions. Not even close. JEA uses revenues from monthly sewer billing to properly treat and dispose of sewage and maintain existing sewers that were initially paid for by homeowners. To use this monthly billing money from existing sewer customers to connect septic tank owners would not be appropriate since it would be using money from homeowners who paid their costs initially to have JEA sewer services connected. JEA would have to raise its rates to existing customers in order to fund septic tank conversions which would not be fair to the existing customers who have already paid to connect to the JEA sewer.

6. **Why does it cost so much for water and/or sewer service?**

Installing the pipes is just one part of developing the system needed to deliver water and/or sewer services. That cost includes disrupting the current streets and removing any existing infrastructure that cannot handle the extra load needed for the additional customers. The engineering and construction costs for water systems typically cost $3,000 - $7,000 per home (or more) and the engineering and construction costs for a sewer system typically range from $7,000 - $20,000 per home (or more) depending on the complexity of the project.

7. **Who do I contact if I have questions about my septic tank or to apply for a repair permit?**

The Duval County Health Department is responsible permitting septic tanks in Jacksonville. If you experience septic tank problems or have general questions, please call (904) 630-3274 or visit [http://www.dchd.net](http://www.dchd.net).

If you have questions that are not answered here, please contact JEA Project Outreach at (904) 665-7500 or e-mail projectoutreach@jea.com