

## **Special Assessment Projects Frequently Asked Questions**

**What is the Four Rivers Sanitation Authority?** The Four Rivers Sanitation Authority (FRSA), formerly Rock River Water Reclamation District, is a municipal corporation (a Sanitary District) founded in 1926, that provides wastewater collection and treatment services to communities throughout Winnebago County. FRSA is governed by a five-member Board of Trustees appointed by the Winnebago County Board. FRSA is not involved with freshwater drainage, storm runoff, potable water distribution or garbage disposal.

**What is a Special Assessment Project?** A Special Assessment project is a type of public improvement financed by real estate tax assessments applied to the benefitting properties (in this case, public sanitary sewer extension). In short, a Special Assessment project is a cost-sharing project whereby the costs of the public improvements are shared between the entity constructing the project and the property owners served. FRSA finances Special Assessment projects through its Public Benefit Fund.

**What is the process of a Special Assessment Project?** Special Assessment projects are initiated when a local resident or residents contact the FRSA and express interest in pursuing a Special Assessment project to provide public sewer in an unsewered area (it is important to emphasize that this process is driven in response to the desires of a majority of local residents and not by any FRSA influences or desires). If FRSA staff determines that it is feasible for an area to be served by public sewer, the steps taken to complete a project generally proceed as follows (this process typically takes at least 6-12 months to complete):

1. Property owner(s) approach FRSA and inquire about the availability of sanitary sewer.
2. If enough area property owners are interested, FRSA staff determines the feasibility of serving the area and prepares a preliminary cost estimate. A summary of the preliminary project information is presented to the FRSA Board of Trustees for review and initial approval.
3. Upon authorization by the Board, an independent appraiser is hired to establish the real estate tax assessment for the parcels within the proposed project limits. This assessment is the appraiser's estimate of the increase in value to the individual property if sanitary sewer were available.
4. An Informational Meeting/Open House is scheduled and all property owners within the proposed project area are invited to attend to learn about the Special Assessment program. FRSA staff presents an overview of the prospective project (including the proposed Assessment amount) and answers any questions. At the end of the meeting, an informal poll of the attendees is taken to determine the level of interest in proceeding with a project.
5. If a significant number of property owners are interested in a project, official Petitions are prepared. The Petitions allow individual owners to express, for the record, their favorable or unfavorable opinion regarding the project. FRSA staff then summarizes the Petition results and presents them to the Board for review. The Board will then vote to allow the project to proceed if a sufficient number of favorable Petitions have been received.

6. A Public Hearing is scheduled (typically before a monthly Board meeting) during which any property owner within the project limits can attend and speak in favor or disfavor of the project. The Board will then conduct a final vote and officially authorize the project if a majority of property owners are in favor.
7. Upon Board authorization, FRSA Staff begins to prepare construction documents for the project. This includes a field survey of existing conditions, completion of detailed construction plans and specifications, and competitively bidding the project for a qualified contractor to construct.
8. Construction is completed, and a sanitary sewer service is now available for connection.

**What are the costs involved for individual property owners?** Although FRSA finances the vast majority of the expenses for Special Assessment projects, property owners will be responsible for the following fees as project cost-sharing participants:

1. **Special Assessment Fee.** This amount is determined by an independent property appraiser and is based on the estimated increase in property value that would result if sanitary sewer were available. Once the project is authorized and under construction, this amount is payable by the property owner, either in lump sum or over a 10-year period (at 5% simple interest). This fee is due regardless of whether a property owner decides to wait or connects immediately to the sewer (see No. 2 below regarding timing for connection). Until the Special Assessment fee is paid off, in full, it is filed as a lien on the property.
2. **Connection Fees.** Once the project is completed and accepted, the owner may connect to the sewer at any time. Connections must be made by a licensed Illinois plumber, registered and bonded with FRSA for the type of work performed (a list of FRSA-approved plumbers is available upon request). Connection fees, currently \$1,266.00 for a single family residence, must be paid in full prior to issuance of a FRSA service connection permit. All fees are subject to change without prior notice.
3. **Plumbing Costs.** The cost of extending a service lateral from the stub at your property line and connecting the service to your house (i.e., all work on private property) is the responsibility of the property owner. This amount will vary depending on the plumbing layout and location of your home and any physical impediments to performing the service extension and connection work. Septic system abandonment may result in additional costs (abandonment requirements are determined by the Winnebago County Health Department).
4. **User Fees.** After a property connects to public sanitary sewer, user fees will be billed on a quarterly basis. These fees are derived from water consumption records obtained from the local water supplier. For properties on private wells, user fees are based on metered water consumption or on a flat rate based on the average metered user fees. A list of current user fees may be found on the FRSA's website currently [fourrivers.illinois.gov](http://fourrivers.illinois.gov) or will be made available upon request.

**Am I required to connect to the sanitary sewer as soon as it becomes available?** No, if your private septic system is in good operable condition, there is no immediate need to connect to the sanitary sewer. However, in the event that your septic system fails, the Winnebago County Health Department would require that you connect public sewer.

**Where will the sanitary sewers be constructed?** Sanitary sewers are typically constructed in public roadways with service laterals stubbed to the property line of each lot within the project limits. All areas disturbed by construction, including pavement surfaces, are restored in accordance with the requirements of the jurisdictional agency. Although FRSA makes every effort to maintain continuous access to the roadways and driveways during construction, there may be short times when access becomes restricted.

**Are there any options for senior citizens?**

To qualifying individuals who meet the age and income requirements, FRSA offers a Senior Citizen Deferral payment program. FRSA's Engineering Department can be contacted at 815-387-7660 for more information.