

Guzy Says:
OAKS & ACORN'S
Page 4



Urban Almanac:
X HITS THE SPOT
Page 5



Nocturne:
LPG & MILANO'S
Page 8



Eclectica:
Papa Logba's
Page 10

Arch City CHRONICLE

people. politics. st.louis. aug 22 - sep 12, 2006 • volume 4, issue 20

\$ DOWN THE DRAIN

BY M. HAZE LESCHER

Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD) now requires strapped plumbing in new buildings and those undergoing total rehabilitation in St. Louis City. The change will add thousands of dollars to the cost of development and has drawn the ire of city officials and developers.

Strapped plumbing earns its name because the plumbing line is strapped to the ceiling of the basement instead of running through the bottom of the basement. Because the strapped plumbing line is higher than the standard system line, significantly higher than the sewer main and involves a sump pump, flooding sewage backup is less likely.

MSD believes strapped plumbing gives homebuyers the assurance that

sewage won't infiltrate their basements. "The purpose is to protect the people who are purchasing the new developments in the city and get a good reputation and just keep the ball rolling," MSD Director of Engineering, Brian Hoelscher said.

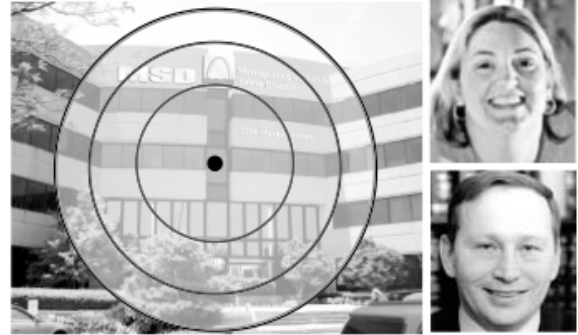
"We're talking raw sewage coming into your home..."

AT WHAT COST?

MSD believes strapped plumbing will cost between \$500 and \$2,000 more per new home. Amy Gill, chief executive officer of Restoration St. Louis, believes it will be more expensive than MSD's estimates. She figures the cost between \$5,000 and \$15,000 per

continued on p 16

MSD'S STRAPPED PLUMBING TARGETED BY DEVELOPERS



Restoration St. Louis CEO Amy Gill (top left) and Alderman Steven Conway (bottom) both oppose new rule.

THE PROFESSOR

\$ DOWN THE DRAIN continued from p 1

building, and asserts that her numbers include costs that MSD neglected to mention, such as the expense of hiring an engineer and a surveyor. Ultimately, Gill attests that the requirements may end up costing her company around \$700,000 over the next few years.

Gill does not agree that the city should move towards strapped plumbing. "I live in the city. I love the city and I want to take care of the city, but this is not the way," she said. She believes that MSD has no solid plan to fix the overall problem.

"If they have no plan it's like pouring money down a hole," she said.

LeComb argues that strapped plumbing is necessary, adding that it would be devastating to the entire community if the city earns a reputation for selling \$300,000 homes with basements that flood.

"When you have a back up, that's a life altering event for several days to a few weeks," he said.

He continued, "We're talking raw sewage coming into your home and in some cases not draining for several hours to several days and it's a life altering event that I don't think you can put a dollar value on in terms of protecting yourself against."

Many MSD critics argue not only about the strapped plumbing project but about a similar code change in which homes must separate waste water and storm water. These critics do not see the point of sepa-

rating the wastewater and storm water only to be reunited in the city's combined sewer system.

Beneath most of St. Louis city lays a combined sewer system in which sewage waste and storm water drain into the same pipe. Most of the County operates under a separate system where two pipes separate the waste water and storm water.

For the City to change to a separate system would be extremely expensive and unrealistic at this point according to MSD spokesperson Lance LeComb, who blames most of the basement backups and floods on the old sewer system.

LeComb explains that "Most parts of the system were installed back when Abraham Lincoln was wearing tall hats and living in the Whitehouse. Back then the system was state of the art. Now, to say it's out of date is probably an understatement."

To fix the problem, MSD is undergoing a \$3.7 billion Capital Improvement and Replacement Program to evaluate and expand the collection and treatment of waste water. The projected 20 year program began over 3 years ago by expanding the capabilities of the treatment plants. This year the program will begin evaluating lines under the streets and alleys.

Bob Boyd, The Plumbing Inspection Supervisor for the City of St. Louis offered a simpler option. "I think if people would have installed a backwater valve it would have been cheaper and easier," he said.

A SHORT HISTORY

MSD was given authority over city's waste water and storm water in a 1954 election. Any changes in the charter must also be voted on. MSD sets the bottom line standard which all municipalities in the city must comply, but some municipalities require higher standards from residents and developers.

Aldermen Ken Ortmann and Steven Conway both spoke out against the new codes.

"MSD has got to use common sense," said Ortmann.

"Why do they want to inflict that financial burden on developers (and renovators) when I don't see MSD doing their part in my lifetime?" he said.

"These aren't new homes," added Conway. "These are houses that have been there for 100 years flushing toilets, and someone has come up with a solution that isn't a solution to anything."

Conway said the committee has pleaded their case to MSD and he hopes that the city's division of plumbing will not enforce MSD's new codes. Conway also mentioned

that he and others may go to the state legislature asking for change. Ortmann said he would support Conway.

MSD meanwhile promises some flexibility. Both LeComb and Hoelscher say that strapped plumbing is not necessary in all cases. A review can determine that strapped plumbing is not required, and MSD has offered a waiver in roughly 20 percent of the developments and rehabilitations reviewed so far.

But answers about who will get a pass, and whether the city will enforce the requirement are far more clouded than the backwater strapped plumbing is designed to keep out of basements. >>

Conway said the committee has pleaded their case to MSD and he hopes that the city's division of plumbing will not enforce MSD's new codes.