



TO: Honorable Mayor & Members of the
Fort Lauderdale City Commission

FROM: Rickelle Williams, City Manager

DATE: May 19, 2026

TITLE: Second Reading – Ordinance Amending Chapter 28, Article II of the Code of Ordinances to Clarify Ownership, Maintenance, Repair, Installation, and Cost Responsibility for Sewer Laterals and Related Sewer Infrastructure – **(Commission Districts 1, 2, 3 and 4)**

Recommendation

Staff recommends the City Commission approve an ordinance amending Article II – Sewers and Sewage Disposal of Chapter 28 of the Code of Ordinances of the City of Fort Lauderdale (Code) to clarify ownership, maintenance, repair, installation, and cost responsibility for sewer laterals and related sewer infrastructure.

Background

On October 22, 2025, the City Commission inquired about the responsibility for maintenance, repair, and relocation of sewer laterals in the City’s wastewater collection system. City staff committed to review the Code to identify ordinance modifications that could further define roles and responsibilities.

Chapter 28, Article II of the Code, titled *Sewers and Sewage Disposal*, establishes core wastewater and sewer system definitions, distinguishes private house sewers/building sewers (owner responsibility) from public sewers and service laterals in the right-of-way (City responsibility). It also creates enforceable requirements—such as mandatory connection to sanitary sewer when available, limits on continued septic use, and maintenance/repair obligations—with penalties for noncompliance.

City staff identified areas in the existing Code that could be modified to ensure consistency with current City operations, improve enforceability, and clarify responsibility for sewer laterals. The recommendations were presented to the City Commission at the January 6, 2026, City Commission Conference Meeting (CAM #26-0074). The presentation included an implementation timeline to present the proposed ordinance amendments to the City Commission in Spring 2026, which requires two (2) City Commission readings.

The proposed amendments to Article II of Chapter 28 include the following:

- Section 28-26(a)(8) – clarifies and standardizes the definition of “building sewer” by explicitly identifying it as the extension from the building drain to the public sewer “up to the property line”, and by formally removing “service lateral” from its listing of interchangeable terms. This revision improves consistency in terminology across the Code and reduces ambiguity between private plumbing infrastructure and public sewer system components, helping to clearly define responsibility boundaries between property owners and the City;
- Section 28-26(a)(36) – adds a formal definition for “house sewer(s) or connection(s),” clarifying that these components are privately owned and include all plumbing, pipelines, and appurtenances located on private property. The amendment explicitly assigns responsibility to the property owner for construction and ongoing maintenance, strengthening the Code’s delineation between private infrastructure and City-owned sewer facilities;
- Section 28-26(a)(76) – clarifies the definition of “public sewer” by expressly identifying all sewer pipelines and related infrastructure located within City-owned property, public rights-of-way, or public utility easements as City-owned or controlled facilities. It confirms that the City is responsible for constructing and maintaining this infrastructure and further specifies that when a service lateral in the public right-of-way does not exist, the City will install it, with the cost assessed to the property owner through a service connection fee. This amendment strengthens clarity regarding ownership, maintenance responsibility, and cost allocation;
- Section 28-26(a)(82) – explicitly assigns responsibility for the service lateral to the City, since it is located outside private property, thereby reinforcing the boundary between public infrastructure and privately maintained sewer components;
- Section 28-37(a) – expressly excludes “from the service connections” to clarify that house sewers and privately owned pumping stations, force mains, and sewers are not City maintenance and repair responsibility. It includes the term “public right-of-way” instead of “system” to further explain that the City’s responsibility is to public sewer infrastructure located within the public right-of-way;
- Section 28-37(b) – clarifies that the customer is responsible for maintaining the house sewer into and including the house plumbing.
- Section 28-56 – clarifies that the property owner is responsible for maintaining its sewer line “on” its property to the City’s sewer lateral located in the public right-of-way;
- Section 28-58(a) – no substantive legal change. The word “therefor” is removed;
- Section 28-58(b) – removes language requiring the property owner to supply approved materials and perform construction of the sewer lateral and cleanout. The change improves legal clarity, consistency, and enforceability without altering the underlying responsibility framework;

- Section 28-58(c) – clarifies who performs the tap service into the main sewer. It establishes that any additional service connections be made “by the City for the service connection fee paid to the City by the property owner”;
- Section 28-58(d) - limits the scope to constructing building sewers only, removing the added obligations for sanitary sewer systems and all the listed restoration/repair work. It reduces and clarifies what is being assigned to the property owner in this subsection;
- Section 28-59 – no substantive legal change. Updates Department’s name from Public Works to Utility Services; and
- Section 28-76(b)(6) - creates a clear, standalone provision requiring consumers who request a new or relocated sewer lateral to pay the City the full cost of installing that lateral.

The first reading of the ordinance was approved by the City Commission on May 5, 2026 (CAM #26-0194). The second reading incorporates minor clarifications as requested by the City Commission. These clarifications include:

- Adding to Section 28-59 – Connections to existing building sewers: Allowing the “repair or lining” of the customer lateral in addition to replacement, if approved by the City.
- Adding, where applicable, that the City’s responsibilities include public right-of-way and/or “easements.”

Staff will be preparing a future Commission item to amend the City Code of Ordinances to update and distinguish the responsibilities and services performed by the newly created Utility Services Department from those that were previously identified under other departments, such as Public Works.

Resource Impact

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item.

Strategic Connections

This item is a Fiscal Year 2026 *Commission Priority*, advancing the Infrastructure and Resilience initiative.

This item supports the *Press Play Fort Lauderdale 2029 Strategic Plan*, specifically advancing:

- The Infrastructure and Resilience Focus Area, Goal 3: Be a sustainable and resilient community.

This item advances the *Fast Forward Fort Lauderdale 2035 Vision Plan: We Are Ready*.

This item supports the *Advance Fort Lauderdale 2040 Comprehensive Plan*, specifically

advancing:

- The Infrastructure Focus Area
- The Sanitary Sewer, Water, & Stormwater Element
- Goal 2: To develop and maintain an adequate wastewater collection and treatment system, which meets existing and projected needs of the City and adjacent users in the Central Wastewater Region.

Attachment

Exhibit 1 – Ordinance

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