

# **City of Brainerd, Minnesota**

## **Street and Sewer Assessment Policy**

### **1. Introduction**

Special assessments are a charge imposed on properties for an improvement that benefits the owners of that selected property. The authority to use special assessments originates in the state constitution which allows the state legislature to give cities and other local government units the authority “to levy and collect assessments for local improvements upon property benefitted hereby”. The legislature designates that authority to cities in Minnesota Statutes Chapter 429.

A charter city (in which Brainerd is) may choose to use either Chapter 429 or provisions of the charter to assess for local improvements, however, even the state law requires that charter cities follow state law in certain steps of the proceedings.

Special Assessments have three distinct characteristics:

- They are a levy the City uses to finance, or partially finance, a public improvement program.
- The city levies the charge only against those parcels of property that receive some special benefit from the program.
- The amount of the charge bears a direct relationship to value of the benefits the property receives.

The City of Brainerd, Minnesota finds it beneficial to fund portions or all the 5-year street and sewer capital plan using special assessments. Special assessment proceedings will follow the procedures as outlined in Minnesota Statute 429 and any modifications thereto.

### **2. Assessable Improvements**

#### **How Much is Being Assessed?**

##### **Developer New Construction**

On projects where utilities and roadways are being constructed for the first time, the developer is responsible for installing the watermain, sanitary sewer, grading, surfacing, storm sewers, and any other incidental features it sees fit. The city requires developers to construct all facilities to city standards and be approved by the City engineering department. While it is ultimately up to the developer to decide how the development costs incurred are recouped, the developer will typically split these costs to the number of parcels developed and recoup its cost through the sale price of the lots.

### **Petitioned New Construction**

On projects where the city is petitioned to install the new improvements, the entire project cost being constructed is assessed to the abutting properties, as either by a per lot basis or by a front-foot basis.

### **Petitioned or Council Authorized Reconstruction of Resurfacing**

Whether the city acts upon its own authority to make an improvement or it is petitioned by property owners, the city assesses one-half (1/2) of the cost of the reconstruction or resurfacing improvement including construction and engineering of the said improvement on a front-foot or per lot basis. The other one-half (1/2) of the resurfacing or reconstruction cost is paid by the city. If utilities such as sanitary sewer, water mains, or storm sewers are being reconstructed along with the project, the cost of this work is not assessed, but rather is covered through user fees and rates set by council or public utilities commission. If a project consisting of overlaying a street is proposed, the entire project cost is assessed to abutting properties. The City does not typically assess for new sidewalks, but may from time to time, assess for the entire costs of repairs thereto.

### **Pursuant to Petition – Properties Abutting the City but outside City Corporate Boundaries**

The City does not construct municipal utilities outside of its corporate boundaries until such time the properties are annexed and within the City of Brainerd corporate boundaries. Once annexation is completed, the utilities are installed and the entire cost of installation of said utilities are assessed to abutting property owners.

### **Pursuant to Council Action – Properties not Abutting the City Corporate Boundaries**

The City does not construct municipal utilities outside of its corporate boundaries until such time the properties are annexed and within the City of Brainerd corporate boundaries. Once annexation is completed, the utilities are installed and the entire cost of installation of said utilities are assessed to abutting property owners.

In prior years, the City Council authorized the construction of utility improvements outside its corporate boundaries and not abutting the city. To pay for such costs, the council established a Water Connection Charge (WCC) and Sewer Connection Charge (SCC). This charge, as initially set by council resolution, represents the average costs of constructing such utility improvements and is payable immediately upon connection to the system. This charge is enacted if the property owner elects to divide the property in which assessments were imposed and deferred. If a lot is split and the owner elects to connect to sewer and water, the WCC and SCC are charged to the property owner, with the balance of the deferred assessment remaining on the other parcel created from the split.

The WCC and SCC set by council resolution will remain in effect until repealed by the council. Said resolution may be adjusted periodically by the city council.

### **3. Initiation of an Improvement**

#### **By Petition from Property Owners**

Per Minnesota Statute 429, if the council chooses to proceed with an improvement based on a petition, it must have the signatures of at least 35 percent in frontage of the property bordering the proposed improvements. If the council relies upon a petition as its basis for proceeding, it cannot make substantial change the improvement from what is asked for in the petition. The council must pass a resolution determining whether the petition is legally sufficient or not.

#### **By Council Action**

Per City of Brainerd Charter Section 92, in the first instance in which the council desires to levy a special assessment for an improvement, it shall require a two-thirds (2/3) vote of the members elect except in the case of sidewalks, in which a majority is sufficient.

### **4. Proceedings**

#### **Minnesota Statute 429**

The City of Brainerd has elected to utilize Minnesota Statute 429 for its assessment proceedings, as amended and incorporated by reference into this policy.

#### **Interest Rates**

The council determines the interest rate on the special assessments, along with any other repayment provisions. The interest rate is typically set by ensuring a reasonable relationship between the assessments interest rate and the bond interest rate if the city issued bonds for the project. If the city finances the project with funds on hand, the council will look at the interest rate the city would otherwise have earned on the funds.

### **5. Payments**

Once the assessments have been adopted, property owners originally have numerous options for repayment:

1. Pay the total amount of the assessment within 30 days after the council adopts the assessment rolls. This this situation, the city cannot charge interest; or
2. Pay the assessments in annual installments (with interest) under the terms set by the council; or
3. Pay the entire amount at any time after the 30 days, but before any certification to the county auditor. The property owner pays only the amount of interest accrued as of the date of payment; or
4. At any time after certification to the County Auditor, the property owner may still pay the entire remaining unpaid amount to the County Treasurer. However, the property owner must pay the entire remaining unpaid amount of the assessment before November 15 of any year and must also pay all interest accrued until the end of that calendar year.

## 6. Deferments

The City Council has adopted policy which allows for assessment deferments for elderly person and for all other persons who fall within the economic hardship criteria. A deferred assessment is not forgiven but is postponed until such time that the property owner either elects to resume making the annual installments as certified, no longer meets the economic hardship criteria, or sells the property. Persons interested in deferring assessments must apply each year to have the following year assessment installment deferred. After 10 years, no further applications are necessary, and the deferred installments will remain permanently deferred without accrual of additional interest, until such time that the deferred assessment is voluntarily paid of the property is sold. The most current deferment criteria passed by council resolution can be requested from the City Clerk and a copy provided to the requestor.

## 7. Other Frequently Asked Questions

### **Will Improvements Affect my Property Taxes?**

While it is well documented within the real estate industry that streets and utilities that are in poor condition decrease the marketability and sale prices of homes, improvements to the streets and utilities do not automatically increase the taxes on the property. Property market valuations, as determined by the County Assessor, are based on the recent sale prices of comparable properties within the neighborhood. Following improvements to streets and utilities, the marketability of properties tends to increase, and the properties can demand a higher sale price. As years pass and the history of sale prices in the neighborhood show increases, the County Assessor will adjust the market valuation of properties to more closely reflect the price the property would sell for. If the market valuations in the neighborhood are increasing at a faster rate than the City, County, and School District averages, the property taxes will tend to increase over time.

### **Why is There a Difference Between my Front Footage and Assessable Footage?**

If you live on a corner lot, your property is subject to assessments for improvements on both streets. The City Council has adopted a side-yard deduction assessment policy to help reduce the burden for the owners of corner lots or reconstruction or resurfacing projects. Your side-yard is defined as the side of your lot with the most street frontage. Improvements made to your side-yard street result in the city paying for the cost of one-half of your side-yard footage and the property owner being assessed for one-half (1/2) of the side-yard footage. The most common assessment notices for side-yard street improvements will list the front-footage as 140 feet and the assessable front-footage as 70 feet.