

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Galesburg, Illinois – The Galesburg Sanitary District is the local, standalone municipal entity with the sole responsibility of collecting and treating the sewage wastewater from the homes and businesses in Galesburg. It was first established in 1924, the result of a public referendum. Wastewater treatment was still a relatively new phenomenon in the U.S., and prior to this time, local wastewater flow was discharged through piping which then dumped into Cedar Creek, where it would finally end up in the Mississippi River. Civic progress – and complaints from those living downstream – eventually led to enough local interest, and the Galesburg Sanitary District was formed.

Looking back on those very early days, in retrospect from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is hard to imagine how much life has changed since then. Calvin Coolidge was reelected as President that same year, while prohibition and the roaring twenties were in full swing. At the same time, plans were being made to capture and clean the sanitary sewer wastewater in Galesburg. Those plans came to fruition in 1930-1931, when operations began at the wastewater treatment plant of the Galesburg Sanitary District. In addition to the plant, capable of treating 5.5 million gallons of wastewater per day, approximately 3 miles of intercepting sewer were constructed and Cedar Creek was straightened or channelized, with portions of it paved to help offset the disastrous effects of flooding which had ravaged Galesburg in both 1924 and 1926.

Fast forward to the 1960's, and again changes were necessary to better collect and treat wastewater in Galesburg. The pipe network, loosely under the authority of the City of Galesburg, had expanded over the interceding years, as had the flows through that network. The piping, carrying both sewage and storm water, frequently carried enough flow to overwhelm the treatment plant, causing bypasses and discharge of untreated sewage, again to Cedar Creek. This was also an era of great change in the U.S., and one of those changes that would have the most impact on the Galesburg Sanitary District was the eventual formation of regulatory agencies that oversee the operation and sufficiency of the District, namely the USEPA and later the Illinois EPA. Due to the plant bypasses, Galesburg was notified that no further development would be allowed until such time as the deficiencies of wastewater treatment were corrected, causing the City of Galesburg and the Galesburg Sanitary District to enter into an agreement which stands today.

That agreement would lead to three major changes locally. First, it was agreed that the District would take over the ownership of the sewer collection system, or piping network, in town. Even then, some of the oldest piping in town was likely nearing 100 years of age, and it was readily acknowledged that little was known of the condition of the existing piping. Secondly, in order to better manage the flow though the treatment plant, it was agreed that the District would build a distinct storm sewer pipe network throughout Galesburg, to separately capture storm water and release it, before it made its way to the sanitary sewer system. Though ambitious, this early decision was ahead of its time, and would be nearly impossible to duplicate today, due to both the cost and the amount of disruption required. Finally, the District greatly expanded the

size of the treatment plant, increasing total treatment capacity to 28 million gallons per day, with the addition of a second, separate plant. Though this second plant was built to stand alone, it was also constructed in such a way that during periods of low flow, all water passing through the plant could be sent through the 1930 plant first followed with treatment by the 1970 plant, greatly increasing removal efficiencies.

Changes and upgrades to both the treatment plant and the collection system have continued since then; however, the next major changes are now coming into view. New, more stringent treatment standards will be enforced on the Galesburg Sanitary District through its operating permit, administered by the Illinois EPA. The first, and simpler change, requires the District to disinfect the water that is discharged back to the environment. Since the mid-1990's, the District has had an exemption from this requirement, but that waiver is being rescinded and not only to Galesburg, but to all major dischargers with flows greater than 1 million gallons per day.

The next category of change results from a national strategy to combat a phenomenon known as *Gulf Hypoxia*. Nutrients such as phosphorous and nitrogen, which are natural components of wastewater and are also well-known fertilizers, are flowing into the Gulf of Mexico from the waterways that drain into it. Most of these nutrients come from either wastewater flows or agricultural activities, but they are arriving at the Gulf in excess quantities. This surplus fertilizer then allows the naturally occurring algae in the Gulf to grow out of control, with a result of the algae using all of the available oxygen in the waters of the Gulf. Without oxygen, virtually nothing but the algae can survive, resulting in a what is called a 'dead zone' around the confluence of the Mississippi River. Over the past 30 years, this dead zone has averaged 5,300 square miles in area.

As a result, all wastewater treatment plants are being tasked with reducing the amount of nutrients discharged from their plants, and Galesburg's is no different. Unfortunately, the existing plants in Galesburg were never intended to remove nutrients and in fact, they are incapable of removing phosphorous. The process used to treat wastewater in Galesburg is known as a fixed media process. This treatment process does an outstanding job of treating what it was intended to treat, but it was never intended to and is unable to treat for nutrients like phosphorous.

As a result of these changing requirements, the Board of Trustees of the Galesburg Sanitary District has embarked on a plan to upgrade the wastewater treatment plant. The engineering firm of Crawford, Murphy & Tilly has begun design of a new process, one that will be able to adequately and efficiently remove nutrients. The process is known as a suspended growth process, and it utilizes a system known as activated sludge. Additionally, plans are being made to disinfect the discharge before it is released, using ultraviolet light. The engineers have suggested a three-phase construction project, building the disinfection infrastructure first, along with biosolids dewatering and storage. Biosolids are a byproduct of wastewater treatment that must also be disposed of. It is anticipated that all three phases will be completed in approximately 5 to 7 years, with the first phase starting as early as this year. The District plans to utilize funds set aside for capital projects to pay for these improvements and to borrow the remaining funding from the State's Revolving Loan Fund (SRF). SRF funds have a 20-year

payback and pursuant to the existing criteria, the District expects to qualify for principal forgiveness on some portion of those loan funds.

In anticipation of these changes and construction projects, the Galesburg Sanitary District Board of Trustees voted at its February 2020 meeting to increase user charges. These fees, collected by the City of Galesburg, are included with the monthly water and refuse bills for residents and are based on water usage. With the increase, the average homeowner can expect to pay \$26 per month, an increase of \$7.50 per month. These increases will be included in resident's next billing.

District personnel are available to answer questions related to the planned improvements and the increased billing, Monday through Friday, 8am until 4:30 pm, at (309) 342-0131. Additionally, considerable information about the Galesburg Sanitary District is available on their website, [www.galesburgsanitarydistrict.org](http://www.galesburgsanitarydistrict.org).