



Candice S. Miller

Public Works Commissioner
Macomb County

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Project to prevent sinkhole disasters reaches major stage

Prevention of major sinkholes such as the Fraser sewer disaster nearly five years ago is a step closer to reality with the completion of a major phase of a \$28 million infrastructure project serving Macomb County.

Excavation of a massive shaft along 15 Mile Road in Sterling Heights has reached a depth of approximately 60 feet, enabling a construction crew to cut away a section of the 11-foot-diameter Macomb Interceptor sewer pipe. Workers have entered the pipe and started clearing debris and sediment – some of which has accumulated during the past 10 to 15 years to a depth of more than 2 feet in some areas. That process will clear the way for upcoming installation of impervious polymer pipe onto a 7,000-foot stretch of unreinforced concrete, from the ITC Corridor to Fontana Drive, just west of Hayes Road. Heading further east from there toward Eberlein Drive in Fraser, 1,300 lineal feet of 8-foot pipe will be spray-lined with a geo-polymer coating.

“We must invest in and maintain our underground infrastructure. It is critically important to our quality of life and protecting our environment. Can you imagine if we have a sinkhole under the ITC Corridor transmission towers, or a sinkhole beneath the Red Run Drain? It would be a disaster,” Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice S. Miller said. “When completed, this project will prevent the chances of that happening for many decades to come.”

The construction is ongoing in what is known as Segment 5 of the Macomb Interceptor Drain Drainage District. Excavation of the shaft, located west of Schoenherr Road, began last autumn.

The MIDDD is composed of 11 communities in Macomb County, and carries the waste shed by approximately 600,000 people. Following the Christmas Eve 2016 sinkhole that occurred on 15 Mile Road at Eberlein Drive just a week before she took office, Miller ordered an upstream and downstream inspection of the interceptor.

“We saw things that would keep you up at night, like weepers and gushers,” said Miller, noting terms that describe cracks in the concrete showing infiltration of groundwater with sand and dirt from outside the large interceptor pipe.

Left unchecked for too long, infiltration can eventually cause the ground above to collapse. Inspectors also found that highly corrosive hydrogen sulfide gas created by turbulence of sewage flowing within the pipe had caused extensive corrosion in some parts, exposing steel support rods

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in areas of the MIDDD with reinforced concrete pipe. Under Miller's direction, chemical grouting has been ongoing over a period of three years in the largest MIDDD district pipes as preventive maintenance to reduce the risk of another sinkhole.

"Lining and grouting of sewers is critical maintenance that our office has set as a very high priority. As we witnessed with the Fraser sinkhole, replacing sections of large sewers and repairing sinkholes costs much, much more and is more disruptive to residents and businesses," Miller said.

The Segment 5 project is expected to be completed around the middle of 2022. It will not result in higher sewer rates to system users, and it is funded by:

*Proceeds from the \$12.5 million sinkhole lawsuit settlement paid to the MIDDD in November 2020 by the insurance company for three contractors whose mistakes while working in the Oakland-Macomb Interceptor to the west caused conditions that eventually led to the Fraser sinkhole

*\$6 million from MIDDD reserves

*Bond financing with payments spread over a period of 20 years

Groundbreaking is expected late this summer for the next major MIDDD rehabilitation project, Segment 6. That will include the lining of approximately 2,100 feet of 5-foot-diameter pipe along 15 Mile Road, east of Garfield Road; lining of a 1,200-foot curved portion of the 11-foot-diameter interceptor at the intersection; a new access shaft; and an "air jumper" to be installed and connected to the existing bio-filter on 15 Mile to alleviate odors that have been prevalent for years.

In April, the MIDDD board voted unanimously to award the Segment 6 construction contract to Ric-Man Construction of Sterling Heights for \$13,541,545. The Macomb County Public Works Office is working with partners at the local, state and federal levels for funding for this project to benefit the ratepayers.

In addition to Sterling Heights and Fraser, the 11 communities in the MIDDD include Utica, New Haven and Clinton, Chesterfield, Harrison, Macomb, Lenox, Shelby and Washington townships.

PHOTOS:

Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller and Construction & Maintenance Manager Stephen Downing discuss the ongoing construction of the Macomb Interceptor sewer rehabilitation project.

The 60-foot shaft that was excavated to reach the Macomb Interceptor sewer.

A portion of the Macomb Interceptor sewer was cut open to get workers and equipment inside the pipe for the rehabilitation project.

Macomb County Public Works staff at the top of the shaft at the Macomb Interceptor sewer observe construction activity in Sterling Heights.

VIDEO: Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller discusses the Segment 5 sewer rehabilitation project at the Macomb Interceptor Drain. <https://youtu.be/zzthpLosUac>



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