

File copy



2329 Fairview East

Seattle, Washington 98102

Phones: EA 5-1132 or EA 9-1517

Number 13

Newsletter

May 18, 1965

HERE IS A PROGRESS REPORT ON USE OF LAKE UNION SEWER: Although there are important details yet to be worked out, progress is being made in devising an acceptable method for floating homes and their moorages to make use of the new Lake Union-Portage Bay sewer. The nub of the problem arises from the absence of official standards and specifications for a system to connect floating structures and other over-the-water installations to the shoreside sewer line.

While houseboats, as we know them, are proliferating in many parts of our country, and while they have long been in use in several European lands, neither the City Engineering Department nor our association has been able to find any place where sewer connections have been installed. (For example, Amsterdam, Holland, where the city rents houseboat moorage space, says it meets the problem by flushing the canals once a day.) While the general engineering problems involved are well known and while the pumping of sewage, particularly in hilly communities, is old hat, the specific standards for such an installation have not yet been devised and applied anywhere. So it seems that we in Seattle are once again cast in a pioneering role.

Finding a solution to the sanitation problem has been facilitated by the creation by the City Council last August of the official "Floating Homes Committee." As has been previously reported, this Committee consists of two members of the City Council, representatives of the various city departments and two members from our Floating Homes Association. This Committee is also reviewing all present regulations applicable to floating homes with a view to the adoption of a Comprehensive Houseboat Ordinance. Its recommendations will go to the City Council.

As was reported in detail at our general membership meeting in February, public health regulations will require floating homes to discharge all "sewage" through the new sewer system. The legal definition of "sewage" is all waste matter, liquid or solid, associated with human habitation. This includes drainage from sinks, washing machines and bath. While our Association urged consideration be given alternative methods such as the new incineration toilets, it has been officially declared that these do not meet public health requirements.

In a memo to the official Floating Homes Committee, the Engineering Department and the Seattle-King County Health Department have agreed on the following division of responsibility: (1) the collection system on the moorages up to the break-away point on the floating home will be considered a part of the side-sewer system for which the Engineering Department will devise standards and specifications (2) the plumbing facilities aboard the floating homes will be subject to the approval of the Health Department.

While there is many an "i" to be dotted and "t" to be crossed, the Engineering Department visualizes the broad outlines of the moorage collection system as consisting of ~~an underwater pipe leading to a sump (also under water) from which the sewage will be pumped to a height sufficient for gravity flow into the city sewer line.~~ Through the use of flexible connections, houseboat sewage will be discharged by gravity flow to the underwater pipe. Engineers do not believe that the use of pumps aboard the individual floating home is either necessary or desirable.

Making use of a conventional sewer system in an unconventional manner will mean that the plumbing on houseboats must be vented and trapped. Kenneth Kennedy, Association vice president, is a journeyman plumber and is working with representatives of the Health Department on just how this can best be done. A number of floating homes have been inspected to determine what problems will emerge. Where necessary, modifications of the plumbing code will be sought.

"What will it cost!" This is a very important and often heard question. It has inspired some wild and unfounded rumors. Some of these rumors originated with the fast-buck-boys who are now using the "sewer-scare" in an effort to beat down the price of moorage property. The facts are that at this point **NOBODY KNOWS** and the

figures being bandied about stem either from profound ignorance or an ulterior motive. In the interest of clarity, it should be again pointed out that the advent of the sewer involves three cost factors and only one of them is known with any degree of accuracy. They are:

FIRST - The cost of the sewer itself. It is being constructed under a formula whereby the City Sewer Fund pays 40% and the abutting property owners 60% of the cost. The actual assessment against the property owners will be determined when the sewer is completed and accepted by the City from the contractors. Property owners will have up to 20 years to pay, with the first instalment falling due one year after the official completion date. Property owners must pay these assessments whether or not they use the sewer.

SECOND - The cost of the installation at the respective moorages for which the owners will be responsible. This will not be determined until standards and specifications are worked out. It may be that a pilot project will be desirable. All we can be sure of now is that through such Association projects as cooperative buying, joint letting of contracts, etc., we will save our members every dollar possible.

THIRD - The plumbing requirements aboard the floating homes for which the owners will be responsible. This will obviously vary considerably. The plumbing on some floating homes now meets the code. The vast majority will have to make some alterations. When the specific requirements are agreed upon, the Association plans to issue a brochure and other information for those who will make it a do-it-yourself project. For those who will want to hire the work done, group contracting through the Association can mean savings.

When definite information is available, our members will be informed promptly. In the meantime, the Executive Committee has this suggestion - don't let the rumor-mongers disturb you. If you have any question, contact the Association.

* * * * *

WE HAVE A BIG STAKE IN ENDING LAKE WATER POLLUTION: The magazine Sea & Pacific sees the new Lake Union sewer as a life saver for houseboats in that it can mean "perpetuating a unique and picturesque part of waterfront life." We agree. No group has a bigger stake in clean water. We certainly look forward to the time when Lake Union will again provide good sports fishing and when, in a manner of speaking, we will be floating on our own "swimming pools."

This is one reason why the Houseboat Colony has resented being the "pollution whipping boy" for the sins of the entire community. While even a little avoidable pollution is too much, floating homes contribute a small fraction of the total. The city itself is the worst offender with twelve outfalls. The new sewer will correct this. Millions of gallons of effluent is dumped into Lake Washington daily and this promotes the unnatural algae growth which slops over into Lake Union. Eventually this effluent will be diverted to Metro trunk sewers.

A recognition that the problem has several facets is reflected in an editorial in the May 1 issue of the Marine Digest which says in part: "While Metro is cleaning up Lake Washington hundreds of pleasure yachts annually dump their waste and sewage into these waters. A move should be enacted that all pleasure craft be fitted with chemically treated toilets. A fine should be assessed against those throwing any kind of waste into the water. Let's clean up our lakes now before it is too late."

The opening of the boating season this year gave melancholy evidence of the need for a "Don't Litter the Lake" campaign. In preparation for this colorful event, the Sea Scouts, with an assist from "Pelican Pete," spent a day removing unsightly drift. This good deed was nullified on opening day by the indiscriminate dumping of litter. By nightfall, Portage Bay, in particular, was an unsightly mess reflecting little credit on Seattle's pleasure boat flotilla.

* * * * *

FLOATING HOMES ASSOCIATION
2329 Fairview Avenue East
Seattle, Washington 98102