

Wastewater & Sewer Infrastructure

Building Capacity Before Growth Demands It by Benjamin Hunt updated 8/30/2026

"A city's ability to grow is determined not by the number of homes it can build today, but by the infrastructure it has prepared for tomorrow."

Preface

Currently, and in a similar situation as we find with our water supply, the city does not control or maintain our sewer system. It is operated by Village Waste Water. City Code does however have requirements of homeowners as it relates to the system. The following is provided in the context that we can work together with Village Waste Water to ensure we are prepared for the coming growth. In addition, there is a large-scale wastewater and sewer study currently underway in Northwest Arkansas which actively impacts Bella Vista. This study is being done by the Northwest Arkansas Regional Planning Commission and is scheduled to complete the study in early Fall 2026. The results of this study will have a direct impact on this document and will likely facilitate changes in its structure.

Overview

Wastewater infrastructure is one of the least visible services provided by city government. Residents rarely think about it, businesses rarely discuss it, and visitors never notice it, yet nearly every aspect of daily life depends upon a reliable wastewater system.

- Every home
- Every business
- Every school
- Every medical facility
- Every restaurant
- Every fire station
- Every commercial development
- Every new neighborhood

They all depend upon wastewater capacity. Some via septic systems and others by sewer. Without adequate wastewater infrastructure, growth eventually comes to a crawl, and we see that on our commercial side here in Bella Vista.

- Our economic development is slow
- Construction has become more expensive
- Public health is placed at risk
- Infrastructure costs rise dramatically

The communities that succeed over the next twenty years and beyond will be those that prepare their wastewater systems before growth demands it and we are already way behind. It needs to be corrected, and it needs to be done quickly.

Mission

To ensure Bella Vista possesses a reliable, expandable, financially sustainable, and environmentally responsible wastewater system capable of supporting residents, businesses, and future growth for generations.

The Twenty-Year Capacity Challenge

Bella Vista continues to experience significant residential growth, and we desperately are being held back on the commercial growth that can provide revenue such as restaurants and hotels.

Each new development places additional demand upon:

- Collection lines
- Lift stations
- Pumping capacity
- Treatment capacity
- Future expansion
- Maintenance operations

Unlike many infrastructure projects, wastewater capacity cannot be expanded overnight.

- Planning often requires years
- Engineering requires years
- Environmental permitting requires years
- Construction requires years

Waiting until capacity becomes a concern is not responsible leadership and planning must begin long before additional capacity is needed.

My Wastewater Philosophy

Wastewater infrastructure should never limit Bella Vista's future and infrastructure should support growth. Right now, we are chasing it and just like water, we don't control our own wastewater infrastructure, so we are currently boxed in. I will address that in another plan should it be warranted after the Northwest Arkansas regional Planning Commission has completed its study. In the meantime, are we prepared for the next 20 plus years?

Strategic Priorities

1. Understand Existing Capacity

The first responsibility is understanding our current system.

My administration will work with the wastewater utility and regional partners to develop a comprehensive assessment of:

- Collection system capacity.
- Lift station performance.
- Treatment capacity.
- Regulatory compliance.
- Capital improvement needs.
- Future demand projections.
- Operational risks.

Reliable planning begins with accurate information.

2. Plan for Twenty Years of Growth

Every new permit approved today increases future wastewater demand. Growth projections should drive infrastructure investments and not the other way around.

The objective is simple. Ensure infrastructure is always prepared before development requires it.

3. Develop a Twenty-Year Wastewater Master Plan

Our long-range Wastewater Master Plan should identify:

- Who controls the wastewater infrastructure
- Who should actually control that infrastructure
- Capacity improvements
- Collection system expansion
- Lift station upgrades
- Treatment requirements
- Future service areas
- Capital investment priorities
- Funding strategies
- Risk assessments

The plan should be reviewed and updated annually.

4. Evaluate Long-Term Governance Options

One of the responsibilities of city leadership is evaluating whether the existing governance and ownership structure continues to provide the highest level of service for residents.

My administration will commission an independent evaluation of long-term wastewater governance options, including:

- Maintaining the current operational structure
- Expanding regional partnerships
- Negotiating additional service agreements
- Evaluating opportunities for increased municipal ownership or operational control where financially, legally, and operationally beneficial

This evaluation will consider:

- Cost to residents
- Long-term financial sustainability
- Operational performance
- Future capacity
- Regulatory responsibilities
- Capital investment requirements
- Governance and accountability

No decision should be made until all facts are known

5. Protect Public Health and the Environment

Reliable wastewater systems protect:

- Public health
- Surface water quality
- Groundwater resources
- Property values
- Economic development

Environmental stewardship and infrastructure planning must work together.

6. Build Strong Regional Partnerships

Wastewater planning often extends beyond municipal boundaries.

My administration will continue building strong relationships with:

- Regional wastewater providers
- Benton County
- Neighboring municipalities

- State regulatory agencies
- Federal funding partners

Regional cooperation frequently produces better long-term outcomes.

Wastewater and Economic Development

Before investing in a community, businesses ask this question: Can the infrastructure support our future? Wastewater capacity is often one of the first engineering questions asked during site selection.

- Communities with dependable infrastructure attract investment
- Communities without available capacity often lose opportunities
- Preparing for growth strengthens Bella Vista's competitive position

Technology and Innovation

Modern wastewater systems rely upon technology.

My administration will encourage continued investment in:

- GIS infrastructure mapping
- Collection system modeling
- Lift station monitoring
- Remote telemetry
- Asset management software
- Predictive maintenance
- Flow monitoring
- Capital planning software

Technology reduces emergency failures and improves long-term planning

Infrastructure Readiness Assessment

One of my administration's priorities will be conducting a comprehensive Wastewater Infrastructure Readiness Assessment with along with the current provider Village Wastewater.

The assessment will answer important questions.

- How much capacity remains?
- Where are our greatest risks?

- Which lift stations require expansion?
- What infrastructure should be upgraded first?
- How should future growth be phased?
- Should additional treatment capacity be planned?
- Should governance models evolve over time?
- Good decisions require objective analysis.

Legal Authority

Wastewater planning involves municipal authority, utility governance, environmental regulation, and regional cooperation.

Municipal Utility Authority

- A.C.A. § 14-235-201 through § 14-235-223 – Authorizes municipalities to acquire, construct, improve, own, operate, maintain, extend, and finance sewer systems and wastewater treatment facilities.

Sewer Revenue Bonds

- A.C.A. § 14-235-215 through § 14-235-223 – Authorizes municipalities to finance sewer improvements through revenue bonds and user fees, subject to applicable legal requirements.

General Municipal Powers

- A.C.A. § 14-54-101 – Grants municipalities authority to acquire property, enter contracts, and provide public improvements necessary for municipal purposes.

Municipal Affairs

- A.C.A. § 14-43-601 – Defines municipal affairs and recognizes local authority over public utilities and infrastructure, subject to state law.

Interlocal Cooperation

- A.C.A. § 25-20-101 through § 25-20-108 – Permits municipalities to enter cooperative agreements with other governmental entities for utility services and infrastructure projects.

Environmental Regulation

- The Arkansas Department of Energy and Environment, Division of Environmental Quality (DEQ) regulates wastewater permitting, discharge requirements, and environmental compliance.
- The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) establishes federal wastewater standards under the Clean Water Act, administered in Arkansas through delegated state authority.

National Best Practices

My administration will support wastewater planning consistently with nationally recognized standards, including:

- Water Environment Federation (WEF) – Wastewater utility management, resilience, operations, and asset management.
- American Public Works Association (APWA) – Public infrastructure planning and maintenance.
- Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Wastewater infrastructure resilience and funding guidance.
- American Society of Civil Engineers (ASCE) – Utility asset management and lifecycle planning.

First 100 Days

- Meet with wastewater system leadership.
- Review existing treatment and collection capacity.
- Commission a Twenty-Year Wastewater Capacity Assessment.
- Evaluate all major lift stations and critical infrastructure.
- Review capital improvement priorities.
- Identify state and federal infrastructure funding opportunities.
- Begin development of a comprehensive Wastewater Master Plan.
- Initiate an independent governance and ownership assessment to determine whether current arrangements remain the best long-term model for Bella Vista residents.

Measuring Success

Residents should experience:

- Reliable wastewater service.
- Infrastructure prepared ahead of growth.
- Fewer emergency failures.

- Increased transparency regarding system planning.
- Environmentally responsible operations.
- Better coordination with future development.
- Financially sustainable capital planning.
- Confidence that sewer capacity will not become a barrier to Bella Vista's future.

Closing Thoughts

Wastewater infrastructure is one of the most important investments a city can make. When properly planned, most residents will never think about it which is exactly how it should be. Our responsibility is not simply to maintain today's system. Our responsibility is to build the capacity that tomorrow's residents will depend upon. The decisions we make today will determine whether Bella Vista remains prepared for responsible growth over the next twenty years.

My commitment is to ensure that wastewater infrastructure never becomes the obstacle that limits our city's future. We will plan ahead. We will invest wisely. We will make decisions based on engineering, financial analysis, environmental responsibility, and the long-term interests of our residents. Because building capacity before growth demands it is one of the greatest responsibilities of city leadership.