



Department Source: Public Works

To: City Council

From: City Manager & Staff

Council Meeting Date: May 19, 2025

Re: Amending Chapter 24 of the City Code to add new requirements related to trenchless excavation for installation of utilities in the public utility rights-of-way.

Executive Summary

Staff is requesting to amend Chapter 24 of the City Code to include new requirements using trenchless excavation methods, such as directional boring, in the public rights-of-way. This proposed ordinance will ensure that all trenchless utility work within the public rights-of-way is done so with proper notification, permits and oversight.

Discussion

On July 17, 2017, City Council amended Chapter 24 of the City Code of Ordinances to include an article regulating and enforcing work performed within the public rights-of-way (ROW). The notification, permit and enforcement process works well for traditional utility excavations.

In 2021 and 2023, there was significant increase in broadband companies expanding or upgrading their fiber optic networks. This resulted in significant numbers of trenchless excavation contractors working in the public ROW performing directional boring work. Damages to underground utilities sharply increased in addition to disruption and damage in neighborhoods. In response, the City developed a Trenchless Excavation Policy in the Fall of 2022. The Policy limited the amount of fiber installation per permit in an attempt to maintain oversight of the contractors and sub-contractors. This policy improved many of the restoration issues that were occurring, but excessive utility locating services, utility damage and lack of restoration continued to occur. The large number of contractors attempting to perform work put a significant strain on the City's permitting, inspection and utility locating services. The Utilities Department is currently contracting with a third-party vendor to meet State law regarding utility locates and accommodate the high number of trenchless excavation contractors.

This amendment to the ordinance specifically defines trenchless excavation and the necessary permitting, construction and inspection requirements. Additionally, it provides a cost recovery mechanism for the additional staff and locate services necessary when large numbers of contractors arrive to install extensive fiber optic projects. By amending the ordinance, staff can confidently use enforcement actions to ensure proper construction and locating services are requested, minimize damage to utilities and complete all restoration activities appropriately. The amendment to the ordinance requires the ROW user to provide their own Safety Monitor to oversee directional boring activities when the ROW user has more than two machines operating in the City. This ensures the City has a single point of contact and a person overseeing the work. For each directional boring machine per ROW



City of Columbia

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user beyond two operating simultaneously, the ROW user will be charged an additional \$50.00 fee for costs incurred by the Community Development Department and a \$0.60 per linear foot for costs incurred by the Utilities Department for the added utility locating services required.

Fiscal Impact

Short-Term Impact: Staff estimates \$30,000 for permit fees and \$600,000 for linear fees for utility locate services in the next 12 months. Fees will offset costs.

Long-Term Impact: Additional revenue to offset costs.

Strategic & Comprehensive Plan Impact

Strategic Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Reliable and Sustainable Infrastructure, Secondary Impact: Not Applicable, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Comprehensive Plan Impacts:

Primary Impact: Inter-Governmental Cooperation, Secondary Impact: Infrastructure, Tertiary Impact: Not Applicable

Legislative History

Date	Action
11/20/2017	B214-17 Amending Chapter 24 of the City Code to add a new Article X pertaining to public utility rights-of-way management.
04/03/2017	REP23-17 Proposed Amendment to Chapter 24 (Rights-of-Way Management).

Suggested Council Action

Approve the ordinance.