Most people prefer not to think about what goes down the drains in their homes. But for Public Works/Utilities staff in charge of sanitary sewer maintenance, getting wastewater to the treatment facility without any problems is essential.

With the Sanitary Sewer Rehabilitation Program, city staff are working with contractors to renew the city’s infrastructure by installing structural liners inside of aging sanitary sewer pipes. The process involves placing a liner into the sewer, inflating it to fit the shape of the existing sewer and then hardening it into a new solid pipe inside of the existing one. The process costs about a quarter of the traditional approach of excavating and replacing the old pipes with new ones, and it takes about half a day, instead of multiple days, to complete.

The 2013 flood was a stark reminder to many Boulder residents of the critical importance of the city’s infrastructure. Inspections performed after the floods revealed that much of the city’s clay and concrete sewers – which account for 65 percent of all sewers – were at or near the end of their useful life.

Spurred by lessons from the flood and the inspection results, City Council approved a recommended wastewater rate increase that went into effect in 2015, providing additional funding and accelerating the timeline for sewer rehabilitation.

“At 2013 funding levels, it would have taken about 90 years to line the entire system. With the rate and corresponding budget increase in 2015, we’re going to be able to do it in 20 years. This will greatly improve the resiliency of the system,” explained Pieter Beyer, the civil engineer in charge of the project.

In 2017, the program resulted in the rehabilitation of all remaining clay and concrete sewers in the downtown Boulder area. Rehabilitation will move to neighborhoods around the downtown area in 2018, with a focus on portions of the Chautauqua, University Hill and Mapleton Hill neighborhoods.

For more information on the program and what to expect if sewers are rehabilitated in your neighborhood, visit bouldercolorado.gov/water.