

# Baltimore Brew

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# City to offer plan to ease the financial pain of water and sewer repairs

*An agreement is struck with a private insurer to cover the cost of utility line breaks*

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Fixing a broken sewer line can quickly become a homeowner's nightmare.

Photo by: [balkanplumbing.com](http://balkanplumbing.com)

insurance policies cover these costs.

Due to the age of Baltimore's water system and the increased likelihood that residents will have to pay large amounts to fix broken lines in the future, the city has entered into an exclusive agreement with HomeServe USA to offer a protection plan "directly to homeowners at pre-determined rates and on favorable terms."

**Voluntary Program**

The Rawlings-Blake administration is set to announce tomorrow a plan allowing city residents to purchase private insurance to protect themselves from the sky-high cost of fixing broken water and sewer lines.

Many homeowners are unaware that water and sewer pipes running between the municipal "main" in the street and their basement are their financial responsibility.

A leaking water line, requiring the digging up of the sidewalk and front yard, can cost between \$2,500 and \$4,000. Repairing a busted sewer pipe can reach upwards to \$10,000. Very few homeowners'

According to information before the Board of Estimates – which is expected to approve the plan tomorrow – HomeServe will protect residential water lines at \$3.99 a month, sewer lines at \$5.49 a month, and both services together at \$8.49 a month.

The protection plan will be strictly voluntary. Residents will pay directly to HomeServe and will not be billed on their city water bills.

Mayor Stephanie Rawlings-Blake will be urging homeowners to buy the service – and the city says it will collect \$150,000 a year from HomeServe to help qualifying seniors and low-income residents pay for repairs. (That's enough to fix about 15-20 sewer breaks a year citywide).

Offering utility protection has become a trend nationwide. Connecticut-based HomeServe says it has entered into agreements with about 40 utilities, including for the cities of Charleston, S.C., and Birmingham, Ala., to cover homeowner costs.

Several cities have taken a more direct approach. Last year, New York City began offering a protection plan that is directly billed to customers on their water bill – and has no deductible.

It is unclear whether the Baltimore program will have a deductible and what exclusions might limit coverage.

According to HomeServe, a technician will be dispatched to assess the damage of a residential utility break, and the company will pay a contractor to do the necessary repairs.

As an incentive to encourage enrollment, HomeServe says that Baltimore customers who sign up now will receive an introductory rate of \$1.00 per month for water-line protection for a year.