

Tampa to postpone water and sewer projects

By [CHRISTIAN M. WADE](#) | The Tampa Tribune

A record number of home foreclosures, bankruptcies and job losses in the past several years have contributed to a significant decline in Tampa's population.

That has translated into fewer utility customers, and a lot less money for the city.

The loss of revenue means Tampa will have to delay about \$230 million in citywide utility projects, including much-touted plans to expand the city's reclaimed water system.

"We have a number of unoccupied homes, and that is contributing to a loss of accounts and funds," said Steve Daignault, the city's administrator for Public Works and Utilities.

He said utility accounts have declined by about 3,000 households in the past two years.

Despite rate increases that have driven up customers' bills, the city's water department has collected about \$10 million less than it had expected to in the past fiscal year.

Tampa had hoped to borrow money for the projects based on expected revenue from water and sewer rate increases, which are being phased in over the next few years.

People aren't paying their bills either, Daignault said, and that has added to the losses.

Among projects to be delayed are the expansion of reclaimed water lines to more homes in South Tampa, and two West Tampa projects to alleviate flooding near Spainishtown Creek and the intersections of Dale Mabry Highway and Henderson Boulevard.

The city also plans to delay two sections of a water pipeline from the David L. Tippin Water Treatment Plant to downtown. The project was to be funded with bonds backed by future revenue from construction fees, which have also declined substantially.

Daignault said the city plans to move ahead with other capital improvement projects, such as replacing aging water pipes in the city's downtown and on Davis Islands.

Still, he doesn't know when the other projects will be taken off the shelf.

"We can't look into our crystal ball and see what the economy is going to do," he said.