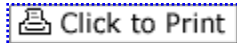




Powered by Clickability

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Elected officials say don't pay fee

Coalition urges Summit County property owners to ignore storm-water charge

By Rick Armon
Beacon Journal staff writer

Published on Thursday, Jul 22, 2010

A coalition of 24 elected officials in northern Summit County is urging property owners to refuse to pay a storm-water fee unless a judge rules the new charge is legal.

The officials — ranging from mayors to council members — issued a declaration Wednesday against the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District, calling the fee unfair and taxation without representation.

Northfield Center Township Trustee Paul Buescher, who has led the opposition, compared the fee to extortion.

"They are saying, 'You pay these fees or we're going to shut your water off or place a lien against your property,'" he said. "I don't like that one damn bit. This is an unvoted, unrepresented tax."

Unless a judge rules that the fee is legal, homeowners and other property owners shouldn't pay, Buescher said.

The Cleveland-based sewer agency board approved the fee — \$57 a year for the average homeowner and more for other property owners — in January but has yet to impose it. It's expected to raise \$38 million in its first full year.

The money is needed to fund a storm-water program designed to solve long-standing flooding, erosion and water-quality problems in the region, the district says.

District Executive Director Julius Ciaccia Jr. called the declaration "very ill-advised and irresponsible."

"In all these months, that group has yet to come up with one constructive solution," he said. "All we get out of them is rancor. I challenge them to come up with a solution. . . . If you think what we're doing is wrong, then you come up with another plan."

The district, which extends into northern Summit County, is seeking a legal ruling in Cuyahoga County to certify its right to charge the fee.

Earlier this year, the agency agreed to postpone the fee until at least October.

Summit County also has sued the district to prevent the agency from imposing the fee within the county. That lawsuit is ongoing.

The county prosecutor has maintained that the county engineer is in charge of local storm-water issues.

The Summit County communities affected are all or portions of Boston Heights, Hudson, Macedonia, Northfield, Richfield, Twinsburg, and Bath, Northfield Center, Richfield, Sagamore Hills and Twinsburg townships. The communities are included because their waste flows into the district's treatment plants.

One of the biggest complaints from county leaders is that no one from Summit sits on the seven-member sewer board. But the district notes that three board members are approved by the suburban communities served, so the Summit communities are represented.

The declaration is supported by county Councilman Nick Kostandaras, Macedonia Mayor Don Kuchta, Northfield Mayor Victor Milani, Twinsburg Mayor Katherine Procop and numerous council members and trustees from Macedonia, Northfield, Northfield Center, Richfield, Richfield Township, Sagamore Hills and Twinsburg.

It notes that any organization attempting to stop water service would face fourth-degree felony charges.

"This is taxation without representation," Milani said. "It's the purest form of it. We're being taxed and we're being shoved a bill down our throat that we've not had a say in and we don't have a say on the board. There's no one from the county that even sits on the board. I don't think it's fair."

He added that residents will have to decide for themselves whether to pay the fee or not, and he's not encouraging anyone to break the law.

For more details about the storm-water program, go online to <http://www.neorsd.org/stormwaterprogram.php>.

Rick Armon can be reached at 330-996-3569 or rarmon@thebeaconjournal.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.ohio.com/news/98994864.html>



[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

Copyright © 2008 Ohio.com