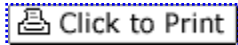




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## Summit researches storm water program

### Tax or fee is possible with new district, says engineering department

By Rick Armon  
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Summit County is studying ways to create its own storm-water management program — a move that would include a new tax or fee to support the effort.

"We have been doing just enough to not get fined by the [Environmental Protection Agency] and we need to do more," said Heidi Swindell, a spokeswoman for county Engineer Al Brubaker.

The program would tackle flooding, erosion and water-quality problems in the county. The specific cost to taxpayers hasn't been determined.

Brubaker has submitted a draft plan outlining potential options on developing the program to the county prosecutor for review. Those alternatives include establishing a regional sewer district, creating a storm-water utility and having the engineer run the program.

Brubaker is recommending that his office oversee the effort, since there would be more direct accountability to voters, according to the draft.

The engineer is expected to submit his final report and recommendation to County Executive Russ Pry and County Council by the end of the year.

The county still must conduct a comprehensive study that would identify potential projects and address such issues as how to deal with communities that already charge storm-water fees. There is no intention to have

people pay twice, Swindell said.

The county also must determine how much money is needed and how to collect it — whether that's through a new property tax levy or a fee.

Asking taxpayers to fund the program won't be popular, but it is necessary, Swindell said.

"We're going to have to start paying for these services," she said.

County Councilman Nick Kostandaras applauded Brubaker's desire to start a program, but said it would be difficult for him to support a new tax or fee.

"I'm not in favor of asking the taxpayers to come up with the money," he said. "Maybe down the road, but not right now, knowing the way this economic crisis is."

Kostandaras said he and others are seeking federal money to help.

The county's effort is not in response to its ongoing legal battle with the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District in Cuyahoga County, Swindell said. One of Brubaker's campaign goals when he was elected in 2008 was to deal with storm-water problems.

The district, which extends into northern Summit County, approved its own storm-water program earlier this year.

Summit County has filed suit, arguing that the district doesn't have the authority to charge a storm-water fee in Summit.

The Cleveland-based sewer agency board approved the fee — \$57 a year for the average homeowner and more for other property owners — but has yet to impose it because of legal challenges. The district expected the fee to generate \$38

million in its first full year.

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