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Sewer district may back out of city projects

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by Laura Freeman

Reporter

Hudson -- The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District says it may not help the city with stormwater projects considering Hudson's involvement in a civil complaint against the organization.

Hudson is one of seven northern Summit County communities that have joined the county in a complaint against NEORSD. The complaint claims NEORSD, which is headquartered in Cuyahoga County, does not have authority to impose fees, taxes or assessments on Summit County residents.

The NEORSD has proposed billing residential customers an average of \$4.75 per month, starting this year, to fund its Regional Stormwater Management Program.

Commercial property owners would be billed based on the amount of impervious surface area on their land.

The city does not believe NEORSD has the authority to "implement a program that imposes a new tax on all property owners in Summit County," Hudson City Communications Manager Jody Roberts said.

However, NEORSD claims its authority stems from a Cuyahoga County Court of Common Pleas decision in the 1970s, Frank Greenland, NEORSD

director of watershed programs, said in November.

While a court date is pending, NEORSD Executive Director Julius Ciaccia sent a letter to Hudson Mayor William Currin saying the district is hesitant to sponsor stormwater projects in Hudson considering the complaint. As a sponsor, the NEORSD helps municipalities get funding from the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency.

“Hopefully, you can understand my concern with sponsoring such projects in light of the position your community has taken in litigation,” Ciaccia wrote.

NEORSD may withhold sponsorship to all communities in Summit County, including Stow and Cuyahoga Falls, because of the civil complaint, said Jennifer Elting, NEORSD public relations specialist.

“They are in jeopardy because Summit County is fighting us and saying we don’t have authority,” Elting said. “We want to do these projects, but they are tying our hands.”

The city of Hudson and the Western Reserve Land Conservancy were seeking the NEORSD’s sponsorship on wetlands projects related to the Youth Development Center property on Hines Hill Road, which the city purchased last year for \$6.9 million. The organizations planned to apply for a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency.

“The grant, which could be up to \$2 million, would protect the high quality wetlands from development,” Currin said. “Because of the letter and indications [from the NEORSD], we are seeking other agencies [for sponsorship], but it’s not easy.”

The letter to Currin mentions projects the NEORSD intended to pursue in Hudson using the new stormwater fees, including \$3 million of stormwater work over the next five years, that it may not pursue because of the civil complaint.

“We would be very disappointed if they choose not to do stormwater projects or other work based on this other issue,” said Roberts. “But we are proceeding with the lawsuit. That is where Council stands on it.”

NEORSD serves 2,900 residential and 4,400 non-residential customers in Hudson, Elting said.

It would raise \$416,100 annually from stormwater fees assessed in Hudson under the Stormwater Management Program, Elting said.

The NEORSD claims in the letter to Currin that Hudson will receive “much more than \$43,000 per year” from the Stormwater Management Program, including the \$3 million for projects.

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