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Sewer district considering raising rates for its customers

about 4 hours ago

by Tim Troglen

Reporter

Hudson -- A program designed to stop raw sewage from seeping into waterways could raise a stink among local residents as their bills increase by 15 percent in 2012.

The program, called Project Clean Lake, is a \$3 billion, 25-year, series of capital improvements designed to stop raw sewage from entering into local waterways during heavy rains, according to the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District.

If implemented, the program is estimated to “significantly” increase sewer rates by about \$80 per year, from an average of \$108 per quarter to around \$127 for NEORSD customers, according to Jennifer Elting, NEORSD public information specialist.

The district includes Cuyahoga County and parts of northern Summit County, including customers in the northwest quadrant of Hudson.

It also includes all or parts of Macedonia, Boston Heights, Northfield, Northfield Center, Richfield, Richfield Township, Sagamore Hills, Twinsburg, Twinsburg Township and Bath Township, Elting said.

The project will reduce the total volumes of raw sewage discharges from 4.5 billion gallons to 494 million gallons annually, according to Elting.

It will also include construction of tunnels and the use of “green infrastructure” to minimize the amount of storm water seeping into the sewer system.

A series of public meetings have been scheduled to explain the program to residents. One is scheduled for Nov. 8 at 7 p.m. at Barlow Community Center, 41. S. Oviatt St. It will include a question and answer period , Elting said.

Hudson officials will attend the meeting, according to Jody Roberts, city communications manager.

“We will be attending the meeting to learn about this new program,” Roberts said. “We have not yet received any information about the scope of the program and therefore do not have a position at this time.”

The NEORS board of trustees is scheduled to vote on the program Dec. 2, Elting said. If trustees approve, they will forward it to the Environmental Protection Agency for approval.

Elting said if the program is implemented, all 330,000 customers of the regional district will be asked to pay 15 to 18 percent more per quarter, including about 30,000 in northern Summit County.

“But this is just an estimate at this time,” Elting said.

Residents currently pay \$40.25 per metric cubic foot, Elting said, and will pay \$48 per mcf next year. She said the average bill is about \$108 per quarter.

The program increase could add up to an additional \$20 to a customer’s bill per quarter, Elting said.

If approved, the increase would be effective January 2012.

“The economy is tough and it’s not a great time to

raise rates,” Elting said. “We are fully aware of that, but this is a problem that needs to be solved.”

Elting said the project will help bring NEORS in compliance with the EPA’s Clean Water Act as well as to help residents deal with storm water runoff.

The program is not part of or in response to civil cases filed in Summit County and Cuyahoga County Common Pleas courts to stop a storm water utility fee, Elting said.

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