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Proposed regional sewer rate increase meets some resistance

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by Tim Troglen

Reporter

Hudson -- About two dozen area residents attended an informational meeting on proposed sewer rate increases by the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District Nov. 8 at the Barlow Community Center in Hudson.

While one Hudson City Council member said the increase “borders on extortion,” some in the audience said they understood the need.

The NEORS D has proposed raising sewer rates 12 to 15 percent by 2012 to fund a \$3 billion, 25-year project designed to stop raw sewage from entering local waterways during heavy rains, according to Kellie Rotunno, director of engineering and construction for the NEORS D.

The biggest problem is combined sewers -- where stormwater and sanitary sewers were built as one system decades ago -- in the city of Cleveland.

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 NEORS D customers, according to Jennifer Elting, NEORS D public information specialist. The project would help bring NEORS D in compliance with the EPA’s Clean Water Act as well as to help residents deal with storm water runoff, Elting said.

Customers in Nordonia Hills and approximately 1,700 customers in the northwest quadrant of Hudson would be billed by the NEORSB for the program, called Project Clean Lake, Elting said. The increase would take effect in January 2012, she said.

“As a resident of Hudson, I think this borders on extortion,” said Councilman George Roth at the Nov. 8 meeting.

Roth said Hudson spends \$1.5 million to \$2 million a year to reduce the amount of stormwater entering the Cleveland water system.

“And now you want to tack on this for something we’ve already paid for to fix your combined sewers up in Cuyahoga County and Cleveland,” he added. “I think there is going to be an absolute revolt and it will be well deserved because we have done our part out here -- you guys have not.”

Doug Hasbrouck, a Hudson Council member, also said he does not believe it is up to Hudson residents to pay for Cleveland’s sewers.

“I don’t see really where you can figure it’s part of Hudson’s responsibility to help Cleveland, or Akron for that matter, separate their combined sewers,” he said.

According to Hudson Communications Manager Jody Roberts, the city is “concerned with the information we’ve received about Project Clean Lake and its significant financial impact to our residents.”

She said Hudson does not have “combined sewer overflows” and added, “We have already invested significant capital dollars in the improvement of our system.”

Elting said if the program is implemented, all 330,000 customers of the regional district will be asked to pay 12 to 15 percent more per quarter, including about 30,000 in northern Summit County.

The district includes 61 communities Cuyahoga County and parts of northern Summit County.

The NEORSD board of trustees is scheduled to vote on the program Dec. 2, Elting said.

NEORSD has scheduled two more meetings to discuss the proposed project; the next is Nov. 16 at 7 p.m. at the Gunning Park Recreation Center, 16700 Puritas Ave. in Cleveland.