



12 suburbs condemn increase in sewer fees for flood abatement

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Tonya Sams, The Plain Dealer



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Brynne Shaw, The Plain Dealer, File

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District is hoping that a proposed flood-control fee could be used to reduce scenes of flooding like this one. Kerry Schwenk of Cleveland braves floodwaters August 20, 2005, to retrieve some belongings from his car which was parked outside of Kauffmans in North Olmsted when torrential rains hit, flooding the parking lot.

CLEVELAND, Ohio -- Twelve suburban communities are calling a proposed regional sewer district storm water fee an "involuntary tax disguised as a fee," according to a joint news release from the cities.

The cities of Strongsville, Bedford Heights, Glenwillow, Cleveland Heights, Oakwood, Broadview Heights, Lyndhurst, Brecksville, Independence, Beachwood, Solon, and Olmsted Falls are challenging the legality of a lawsuit that was filed against them by the Northeast Ohio Sewer District in Cuyahoga Common Pleas Court over new sewer fees.

""This is the first time that mayors and managers of these communities have issued a statement outside of the lawsuit concerning the fee, according to a legal spokesperson for the communities.

The sewer district board members decided in January to impose a fee on home and business owners, schools

and churches. The fee centered on property surfaces such as roofs and driveways.

The fee, which would effect 330,000 people throughout Cuyahoga County and areas of Summit County, is expected to take effect Jan. 1, 2012. Collection was set to begin July 1, then was delayed until Oct. 1 after a wave of communities opposed the fee by filing suit against the district.

Money raised from the fee, which is expected to be \$38 million annually, will go toward projects to prevent flooding in communities served by the sewer district.

The leaders of these cities are fearful that the increase is coming at a time when the economy has taken a severe hit that will possibly affect the increase of new businesses in the area.

City leaders stated that they have already taken the necessary measures within each community through their own tax dollars to make sure that all new developments comply with requirements to help regulate storm water and drainage. They believe that their communities do not need the burden of having to pay these addition fees.

Leaders also stated that there is no legal or environmental requirement for the fee, that it punishes cities that have responsibly addressed sewer issues in their communities and takes money away from them to help cities miles away, that it does not address regionalism because only certain areas will be affected and that the fee is something that should be voted on, according to the news release.

"What's new? They stated that position in their motions in court," said Julius Ciaccia, sewer district executive director, when told of the statement. "We have millions of problems that have gone attended and the problems are compounding.

He added, "It's amazing that these communities have the money to spend on legal fees when they have cut back on police and fire."

If the program is implemented the new rates could cost homeowners \$57 more a year and commercial property owners about \$2,300 a year.

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