

BACKGROUND: CITY OF ELYRIA STORMWATER UTILITY PROGRAM

Community Overview

- Founded in 1817
- Nestled at the two forks of the beautiful Black River
- Six miles south of Lake Erie
- Twenty miles west of Cleveland, Ohio
- Majestic waterfalls
- 365 acres of parks

Stormwater Pollution Overview

The water quality of Elyria is being threatened by something called stormwater pollution. During heavy rain events a significant amount of the rain that falls on Elyria falls on “impervious areas.” Impervious areas are hard surfaces that cannot absorb stormwater, including roofs, asphalt, concrete, gravel lots, etc.

The stormwater that runs off these hard surfaces:

- Collects oil, salt, soil, fertilizer, pesticides, animal waste and many other impurities
- Becomes stormwater pollution
- Then makes its way into Elyria’s Black River and, ultimately, into Lake Erie

Elyria is not alone in having to deal with stormwater pollution. According to the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), 40 percent of our nation’s waterways remain polluted -- and stormwater runoff is a leading cause of that.

Antiquated Sewer System

Being a charming, but older, city founded in 1817, Elyria has an aging sewer system. Many residential areas in Elyria have severe flooding and drainage issues.

Environmental Protection Agencies

Since 2003, the City of Elyria has been required to comply with the unfunded federal mandate known as the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) water quality regulations, which are part of the 1972 Clean Water Act. These regulations require the City of Elyria to reduce pollutants and stormwater runoff.

In addition, the city has been audited several times by Ohio EPA, with violation findings after each audit. Without a dedicated funding source to address these regulations, Elyria will not be able to comply with the mandate, which could result in large fines to the city.

However, *with* a funding source, the city will be able to fund and implement stormwater management activities throughout the city.

Elyria's Approach to Managing Stormwater

In response to the EPA unfunded mandate and rising costs related to stormwater management, Elyria Mayor Holly Brinda and city council members asked city staff to create a stormwater business plan and a stormwater utility program. The plan established a dedicated funding source to cost-effectively manage stormwater and comply with U.S. EPA water quality regulations (unfunded mandate). Additional funds will be used to address drainage and flooding issues throughout Elyria.

The High Cost of Compliance

Over the years, Elyria Mayor Holly Brinda and city council members looked for ways to alleviate flooding, water in basements, the discharge of contaminated water into rivers and streams, and other water-quality problems within the city. And the city wants nothing more than to fully comply with the U.S. EPA and Ohio EPA. In fact, Mayor Brinda and several city council members support the efforts of both EPAs in keeping our nation's rivers, streams and lakes as clean as possible.

However, all of this comes at a price. The City of Elyria did not have a dedicated funding source for stormwater management as it does for other city services. And neither the U.S. EPA nor Ohio EPA has funds available.

Fee Assessed

So the city is reaching out to residential homeowners and non-residential property owners in the city. It will certainly take a team effort to comply and make the changes that need to be made. In a necessary move Elyria city council passed a stormwater utility fee (not a tax) that created a dedicated funding source to be used exclusively for complying with the mandate and supporting stormwater projects throughout the city.

Beginning April 2016, residential homeowners and non-residential property owners will receive their first Elyria stormwater utility bills in the mail. Subsequent bills will arrive quarterly. This will be a separate green and white bill with a unique account number, unrelated to other Elyria utility bills.

- *Residential homeowners* will pay the same fee of \$7.95 per quarter or \$31.80 per year.
- *Nonresidential property owners* will pay a fee based on how much measured impervious area was measured on the property or properties they own.

To keep the fee structure somewhat uncomplicated and proportional, every fee is based on something called an Equivalent Residential Unit or ERU. One (1) ERU is always equal to 2,700 square feet (of impervious area) and has a rate of \$2.65 at this time. The ERU concept has been used elsewhere with great success.

Where Will that Money Go?

The largest portion of the revenue generated by the stormwater utility fees will be used to comply with NPDES water quality regulations. The funds will also be used to support the funding of stormwater projects throughout the city, including, but not limited to, the installation of a relief sewer on the east side of the city.

Plan in Place

The Elyria engineering department has a plan to start addressing these issues. Work is scheduled to begin in 2016. A listing of preliminary projects, along with a map depicting the location of each, can be found here: www.elyriastormwater.com.

Stormwater Mission Statement

The city of Elyria Stormwater Utility Program will provide stormwater management in a respectful, fair and timely manner and promote a high quality of life utilizing a cost-effective, environmentally sound approach to meet and maintain EPA NPDES water quality permit requirements and responsibly address drainage and floodplain management with available resources.”

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