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[Next Story](#)

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# Study recommends Lake County increase sewer rates

A study of the Lake County Utilities Department's revenues and expenditures to provide sewer services to its customers recommends rates increase by 5 percent in 2015 and in 2017.

Utilities Department Executive Director Rick Martin said an internal review is conducted annually and then every fifth year a study is conducted by an outside party.

"This approach has resulted in a steadfast control of rates while setting aside operating and maintenance revenues and planning for debt issuance and addressing capital projects," Martin said April 28 during a Lake County commissioners meeting.

The study was conducted at a cost of \$30,000 by the Cleveland office of Arcadis, Martin said.

The company has conducted these types of studies in about 40 communities in Ohio, said Associate Vice President Said W. AbouAbdallah.

"The primary goal of the study was to provide feedback on the LCDU financial management strategies and recommend rates, fees and charges to recover the costs of providing sanitary sewer service," Martin said.

AbouAbdallah said most communities have aging infrastructure and the study examines their needs including the Utilities Department's annual capital improvement plan for about \$4.5 million annually.

"The goal is to continue to provide a high level of service, which you have here," he said.

AbouAbdallah said the county's rates are low for sewer service when compared to most others in the state and would stay that way even with rate increases of 5 percent this year and in 2017.

"You will achieve a good balance with your revenues and your expenditures will line up," he said. "You will use a good combination of cash and debt service for your capital planning and will be able to continue what you want to do."

Lake County Commissioner Daniel P. Troy said commissioners determine the rates to charge customers and their decision is based on recommendations from the Utilities Department every two years.

In 2013, commissioners did not raise the sewer rates and last did so by 5 percent in 2011, Troy said.

"The reason we've been doing this every two years is because we ran into a situation shortly after I took office when nothing had been done for 15 years," Troy said. "Overnight, we had to have a 27 percent increase and then we set up a policy to look at these every two years."

Martin said the Utilities Department would provide a recommendation to the commissioners to raise the fees by 5 percent in 2015 and 2017 and propose a mid-summer effective date.

Sewer customers served by the Utilities Department consists of those who live in the townships of Concord, Leroy, Madison, Painesville and Perry; villages of Fairport, North Perry, Perry, and Grand River; and the cities of Mentor, Mentor-on-the-Lake and Kirtland.

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