

Concern floods meeting

Willoughby considers feasibility of expedited sewer projects

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As residents continue to calculate damage caused by a July 20 storm that dropped up to 6 inches of rain during a short time span, communities are coming to terms with frustrated residents and outdated sewer infrastructure.

Willoughby residents spoke out at the first council meeting since the deluge of water flooded into their city, and asked what the city plans to do to prevent future damage from excess stormwater and sanitary backup.

Katie Tyler, a St. Clair Street resident, said she experienced flooding in 2006 after owning her home for three months.

Between the 2006 flood and the July 20 storm, she said she's probably had to clean out her basement 35 times.

"I can't live in that house and I can't sell it," she said. "We've replaced a brand new furnace and a washer

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and dryer. I have space in my house I can use because I have crap in my basement. I'm sitting on a huge debt that's worth nothing. I've grown up here my whole life. I don't want to move."

Craig Budreo, a Kyle Cove resident, asked about water flow problems along Ward Creek and wondered if eliminating brush near Lost Nation Road would help improve water flow.

"I live basically on Ward Creek. And sometimes, like on July 20, I live in Ward Creek," he said. "This year I got off very lucky. I only had 2 inches of water in my lower level and \$5,000 in damage. The last time, in the 100-year flood six or seven years ago, I had \$30,000 in damage and 18 inches of water in my basement."

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A sewer system works like a sink, said Mayor David Anderson. When a sink is running well, the water goes right down when the faucet is turned on. Dump a bucket of water in the sink, and it will still drain but at a slower rate. When five buckets of water are dumped in a sink at once, it'll overflow.

On July 20, Lake County was hit by five buckets.

Between midnight and 1 a.m. on July 20 about an inch of rain fell, Anderson said. That water receded, but then between 3:15 a.m. and 4 a.m. five times that amount of water fell.

"We are facing some huge types of dilemmas. There's really a two-pronged problem in this. The first prong has to do with the storm sewer system itself and how it's designed," he said.

"The question is what does it take to build bigger systems to handle something like that? At first blush, it looks like it would be so prohibitively expensive that we couldn't even consider it. To build a system in the city to handle the 100 and 200 year events — I know those terms get thrown out a lot — to build it that big would be in the area of about \$400 million."

For a city the size of Willoughby, raising enough money to build a system that size would equate to an 80-mill levy.

"Currently with the schools, the county and with everybody, you're currently paying about 69 mills," Anderson said.

"If we'd double property taxes we could afford a system that big ... that's why no city that we've heard of in the country has built a system to handle that five buck-

ets. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't do something."

The second prong of the major problem facing Willoughby is the sanitary system backup into the stormwater lines, which is called inflow infiltration or INI. Since the 1970s, regulations from the federal Environmental Protection Agency have stated sanitary and stormwater lines are supposed to be completely separated. But some of Willoughby's systems were built in the 1950s.

At the start of 2013, Willoughby started a study on the stormwater and sanitary sewers to see what needed to be done to start prioritizing projects.

The plan, said the mayor, was to target one project a year for seven years to be the most financially responsible. But with heavy rain events occurring more frequently, the city is looking into the feasibility of expediting the process.

The city has made progress on complying with EPA regulations and lining the existing public sanitary sewer lines. Those areas have met with success, but the problem the city is running into is figuring out what to do with aging sanitary lines on private property.

"That connection from the (private) house to the (public) right of way that's where there's INI," said Council President Jerry Ranally, who represents Ward 3.

"We certainly will address the stormwater issue. Our focus in the past has been mainly sanitary because of the EPA has been on about the INI."

Over the past 30 years, the city has spent more than \$35 million to fix the main public sewers, replacing them in many cases so the problems residents are seeing don't occur in the main lines,

Anderson said.

"Where it's happening in most cases is on private property," he said. "The question is how do we get everyone on private property tested and how do we make private citizens pay to have this corrected?"

Anderson added he had to pay to fix his property's sewers 30 years ago to remedy the same problem. Then it cost \$4,000. Now that cost can be from \$7,000 to \$10,000.

Compounding the frustration residents feel is the fact that so far it appears as though the county's damage assessment is falling short of the requirement needed to obtain federal disaster aid.

"We know it affects people. The July 20 storm event affected 15,000 basements (in Lake County)," Anderson said.

"We will be coming to the council to prompt some real discussion on what we can do here."