

County officials float fixes for flooding

Elizabeth Lundblad

ELundblad@News-Herald.com

Twitter: @NewsHLiz

A month and two days after a massive rainstorm inundated the county's stormwater lines and sanitary sewers, residents remain frustrated about repeat flooding issues.

And county officials say they're continuing to investigate possible solutions.

Residents from three eastern Lake County communities spoke about their flooding problems at Thursday morning's Lake County commissioners meeting, asking the commissioners if there's been any determination in cause and what all involved can do about it.

Fairport Harbor resident Tim Hadden came on behalf of his mother, also a Fairport resident, who received 5 feet of sewage in her basement following the July 20 rain storm.

"She also received raw sewage in her basement on a flooding event that happened June 2 of this year... and on Aug. 13 of this year. It's a situation that's been going on for at least 25, if not more, years," he said.

Hadden said he had talked with the commissioners three to four years ago and since then things seemed to have deteriorated. He said the county has done work on the sanitary lines, but the results haven't been as expected.

Rick Martin, director of the Lake County Utility Department, said in the last three or four years the county has invested \$750,000 in the Fairport Harbor portion of the system to help alleviate the problems in the sanitary system.

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"There's a lot of talk about the source (of the water). Where is (the additional water) coming from?" he said.

"Certainly we hope for our projects to have better results also. The new one (issue) is what you've just talked about, where there's been three incidents in a short period of time."

Residents understand that 5-inch rain events, like July 20, overwhelm a system, Martin said.

What needs to be addressed is if new sources of water infiltrate the sanitary system, then the county and the residents need to see where those sources are and how to best fix the leak.

Niles Oinonen, another Fairport resident, said during the last two rainstorms, East Street has turned into a river.

"Something has changed somewhere. The stormwater is getting in (the sanitary sewers) and going north of us," he said. "I pump water every time out of my basement."

Oinonen wondered if development in the area has changed the topography of the land, forcing the stormwater to flow into the roads.

He said the drains to the sewers are full of sludge and clogged.

Commissioner Dan Troy said it is the village's responsibility to unclog its drains.

"The problem with Fairport's system is that it's old. The county took it over at the request of the (Ohio Environmental Protection Agency)," Troy said.

"We need to get together, rather than us finger pointing back and forth, and find out what's wrong here, probably a myriad of causes."

Martin said the EPA doesn't want the county expanding sanitary lines to accommodate stormwater overflow because the two systems are supposed to be completely separate. While the county-owned sanitary mains have been fixed or upgraded in previous years, that isn't necessarily the case with privately-owned lateral lines that connect homes to the central line.

"When there's heavy waters around these lateral (connections) are bad. We noticed it 2006 and now," Martin said. "We're looking at getting more manpower to go out and study these events."

That work would likely involve viewing the lateral connections from the inside, but Martin said to get a proper look at any leaks it would need to be during a rain event.

While part of Fairport's problems may be related to its system's age, Painesville Township resident Mark Koestner

said he lives on Outrigger Cove in a 10-year-old development and his basement has flooded more than once with multiple feet of sewage.

"We've been told we're on a gravity feed (for the sanitary sewer). My neighbor's basement is six inches above the sanitary line, I'm about a foot above it," he said. "We in the low spots of this gravity feed are decimated by sewage when

this occurs.

"Is this something we can fix? That's kind of what we're all wondering here," Koestner added.

"I've lived in this home nine years, I built it. I'm wondering, and I think my neighbors are wondering the same thing, aside from putting in backflow preventers — which we've all been told to do and we're doing — is this (flooding) a long-

term thing? Is it fixable? Do we need to move? That's where we're all at right now."

Troy and fellow Commissioner Bob Aufuldish questioned the flooding and sewage backup in such a new development, wondering if the individual contractors had stuck to the stormwater drainage plan submitted by the developer when the houses were built.

Martin said Koestner's

homeowner's association had hired an engineer who found that the development has clearly moved away from the stormwater plan. Martin added he's spoken with the county stormwater director who agrees that there's a lot of stormwater area that wasn't in the submitted plan.

Lake County Administrator Jason Boyd, who formerly served as director of the county

Planning Commission, said the county did what it could from an administrative point of view in accepting the submitted stormwater drainage plan. When the lots are sold to the private owners, it's the hope that they follow that drainage plan.

"We don't have a policing ability. Maybe there's a zoning issue (from the township's side)," he said.

Discussions

More on the flooding problems in Lake County and possible solutions.
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