

Lawn sprinkling program may come to Willoughby

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Willoughby City Council is looking into hosting a pilot program for a residential summer sprinkling program to address concerns from citizens about elevated summer sanitary sewer fees.

After last year's dry summer, the council re-evaluated the idea of lowering deduct meters in the city. The meters read the amount of water used by exterior faucets, used primarily for watering lawns, washing cars and other yard work.

However, most water from exterior

faucets is absorbed by topsoil or evaporates, never reaching the sewers but still being counted as usage. This can artificially inflate a property owner's sanitary sewer fee.

"We've all been getting some calls from residents about sprinkling programs like other municipalities have," said Ward 2 Councilman Bob Fiala.

The council saw two options to try and rectify the problem, either calculate a summer average using the rates from the other three seasons or allowing deduct meters, also called demand meters, to be installed.

Water passing through the deduct meter would not be assessed the

sewer charge, wrote Mayor David Anderson in an email.

"Both options are going to cost the city revenue," Fiala said.

"The best alternative would be demand meters. So we'd monitor the sprinkling independent of other usage. It has less impact on the revenues that way."

Willoughby Finance Director Ray Rogowski was able to use data from cities like Wickliffe and Willoughby Hills, which have summer sprinkling programs, to see what impact Willoughby could expect.

"It was between 5 and 8 percent in terms of a decrease in revenue (from the sanitary sewer)," he said. "That's

about \$165,000 to \$265,000 per year."

With state cuts to local government budgets, Fiala said the council is nervous about losing revenues but will try out the deduct meter program. Legislation is likely to make an appearance at the next council meeting.

"This program will be limited to single family and two-family homes for the present time," Anderson wrote. "After a year or so we will examine the effects of the program on our sewer fees and discuss the advisability of extending the program for multi-residential and commercial properties."