

Residents ask commissioners for help with flooding issues

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Gazette Newspapers

LAKE COUNTY – A number of county residents from different areas asked the Lake County Board of Commissioners for assistance with flooding issues they have been faced with repeatedly.

Tim Hadden of Vine Street in Fairport Harbor was the first to address the commissioners at their Aug. 22 meeting concerning flooding issues he and his mother both had at their homes.

"She received about five feet of raw sewage in her basement," he said, noting this occurred June 2, July 20 and Aug. 13. "It's a situation that's being going on for at least 25, if not more, years."

Board President Bob Aufuldish said he believed the Lake County Department of Utilities had done a bit of work in his mother's neighborhood.

Hadden said it had, but they did not get the expected improvement.

"I believe a few years ago we completely televised the entire system," Aufuldish said.

Rick Martin, director of Lake County Department of Utilities, said the county has expended about \$750,000 in that area of the village to try to remedy the problems. He noted the village had a

combined sewer/sanitary system which still had footer drains connected (bringing stormwater into the sanitary system and overloading it).

Niles Oinonen of East Street in Fairport said his street became a "river flowing south with actually waves and whitecaps" during the last two heavy rain events. He said he believed something has changed in the area.

Commissioner Dan Troy asked if the Lake County Stormwater Management Department had found anything that could be the cause of such increased flooding.

Oinonen said his wife had been checking out the drains on the street and found them to be filled with sludge and other debris.

Troy said clogged drains were the responsibility of the village's Service Department, not the county. He added a big problem with Fairport's stormwater and sanitary systems is that they are so old and the county had accepted the system years ago at the request of Ohio EPA since the sewage was going into the lake, untreated.

However, Troy said, the main thing was to find out how to fix it and not seek to place blame.

Martin said it was going to take more time and money to determine where the problems were. He said

they needed to work with residents to find out where all the stormwater was entering the sanitary system.

Hadden said the number of residences in Fairport had not changed substantially over the years and they never had such flooding problems 60 years ago.

Martin responded that the old laterals could be leaking and he will put on more manpower to monitor the system during rain events.

"Since that Hemisphere Project has gone on, the (Zion Lutheran Church) cemetery turns into a swamp where we can't even bury folks when it's time to go," said Oinonen, the sexton, stating the direction of waterflow has changed because the topography has changed.

Mark Koestner of Outrigger Cove in Painesville Township said his 10-year-old development is having problems with sewage backing up into basements which have gravity feed.

"I've lived in this home only nine years; I built it and I'm wondering – and my neighbors are wondering – aside from putting in backflow preventers, which we've

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all been told to do; is this a long-term thing; is it fixable; do we need to move," he said.

Aufuldish said he understood the stormwater flows were disrupted by the way some swales were put in.

"The homeowners' association hired an engineer to look at the subdivision, which is about 500 homes, and he has found that they have wandered a ways from the master drainage plan," Martin said.

Problems included swales which were removed and landscaped and sheds which were placed where they

should not be, both of which affected the flow of storm water.

Troy asked if the county could oversee the developments to ensure they follow the approved plans.

Jason Boyd, county administrator and former director of the Lake County Planning Commission, said the county did review and approve plans, but when the builders and architects came in they would change things and that was a zoning issue. Problems could also occur when homeowners decide to add patios or retaining walls

which were not anticipated.

Another problem is when too much storm water enters the houses for the sump pumps to keep up. Then the houses flood and the storm water goes down the basement drains into sanitary sewers, overwhelming them and causing them to back up into houses.

One resident, who lives near a creek which overflowed, had four feet of water enter her home through the outside basement entryway.

Michael McCullough of Pinehill Road in Concord

Township said his development, which is in a valley by Ellison Creek, appeared to be in danger of losing its access road due to stormwater runoff from above.

He said he has been in contact with the trustees and Lake County Engineer's office because of the homeowners' association's concerns.

Troy said, in more recent years, regulations have been enacted to deal with soil erosion and similar problems caused by development, but they really should have been put in place 20 years ago.