

Willoughby eyes lawn sprinkling program, deduct meters

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After an exceptionally dry summer, Willoughby officials are considering a course of action that would reduce sanitary sewer fees paid by residents on water that

doesn't actually reach the sewer.

Sanitary sewer fees for residents are based on household water usage, which currently includes water exiting homes from outdoor faucets, typically used for watering lawns, washing cars and yard work.

A majority of this exterior exiting water evaporates or is absorbed by

the topsoil, but the water is still counted in the usage and, depending on how green residents like their lawns, could artificially inflate the property owners' sanitary sewer fee.

At Tuesday night's Willoughby City Council meeting, council members discussed two possible solutions to the problem: allowing the

use of deduct meters or creating a lawn sprinkling program.

Deduct meters would be an additional meter purchased by the homeowner that would only read the amount of water being used by exterior faucets, Mayor David Anderson said.

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The amount of water used would then be deducted from the sanitary sewer fee.

Anderson said he also has explored lawn sprinkling programs favored by some other local cities, like Euclid. In the program, a household's water usage would be averaged during the winter months and then charged to the residents to avoid a spike from exterior water inflating the sanitary sewer fee.

Council President Jerry Ranally, who represents Ward 3, said council has talked about allowing deduct meters and having a sprinkling program in the past. But council members have been receiving more calls about their sanitary sewer fees this past summer with the exceptionally dry weather.

"I still have a number of residents who are very religious about watering and maintaining their lawns," he said.

Anderson also cited new

construction, landscaping and homeowners installing sprinkling systems as other reasons the city has experienced an increased number of calls this year.

Although the concept of using a deduct meter was brought up years ago, Anderson said the city was reluctant to approve that option because using deduct meters would cause a significant dip in funds received from the sewer.

"We had several large businesses in town and we could not differentiate with the deduct meters between residential and businesses meters," he said. "Our fear was that these large industries would start using these, and the fact would be we'd have to raise rates to make up for that loss with only a few residents getting an advantage but businesses basically getting the advantage."

The lawn sprinkling programs he's investigated haven't been overrun with residents wanting to participate, Anderson added.

Councilman at-large Jeff

Black said residents he's heard from seem to be leaning more toward the lawn sprinkling program, but added, "They don't really care which way as long as they're getting some credit for the lawn watering."

With both plans, which would be optional, residents would be responsible for either buying their own deduct meter or paying a flat fee to be a part of the lawn sprinkling program.

Council will try to have a utility representative at the panel's first October council meeting to discuss the options and determine which would be the best route for the city to take.