

It pays to get involved!

You can still make a difference.

In mid-January, Buckeye Lake Sewer District customers received a letter announcing a proposed rate schedule starting at \$49 per month per EDU, reaching \$62.40 per month by January 1, 2012. The proposed increase for this year was 69 percent. The total increase was 115 percent. Customers were invited to a January 31 public meeting at Lakewood High School.

A small group led by Kitty Zwissler and Ed Houk started a petition and publicity drive for the public meeting. More than 450 customers turned out for the meeting, spending more than three hours calmly explaining why the proposed rate hike was unreasonable. More than 500 customers signed petitions opposing the increases.

That turnout for the meeting and the signatures convinced commissioners to take another look at the proposal. Once we had their attention, we had to show them that there are financially feasible alternatives. That's a job for a much smaller group and four customers stepped forward: Merv Bartholow, president of the Buckeye Lake Area Civic Association (BLACA); Tim Weisert, vice president of BLACA; Buckeye Lake activist Peggy Wells; and this writer. We had already identified a low cost Ohio EPA loan program that hadn't been pursued by the district. That loan by itself could save customers \$7-8 million dollars in interest costs. We learned that the district could still qualify for the loan even though plant construction had already started. Commissioners and the district are now committed to aggressively pursuing that loan.

Merv and Tim spent hours creating and updating spreadsheets demonstrating that the hike to \$49 per month was too much and too soon. They argued that the projected increases for salaries/benefits and contracted services were too high. The group researched the details behind the district's spreadsheets and analyzed census data to determine eligibility for the one percent Ohio EPA loan.

Group members were at every commission meeting with Water and Wastewater Director Ken Salsberry on the agenda. They asked questions and presented their findings and recommendations. Our persistence led to a much larger role for County Finance Director Chad Fuller. He presented a nearly one-inch-thick, well researched rate analysis to commissioners on March 22. While we didn't agree with all his conclusions, he was the first to provide real numbers to justify his recommendations. He has agreed to reevaluate some of our recommendations once we have some experience with the new rate.

The results are clear. The rate for 2007 will be \$37 per month instead of \$49 per month. It may remain at \$37 per month through 2008, as opposed to increasing to \$52.40 per month. Yes, the rate will get to \$49 or slightly above by early 2008 or 2009, when the cost to pay for the treatment plant expansion is included. However, that cost will be listed separately and won't increase over the term of the loan or bonds. Instead, it should decline as more customers join the system. Even under the worst case scenario using revenue bonds, the rate would be \$51.25 per month in 2008.

The operating rate of \$37 will likely increase about a buck or two a year after next year. Using the middle point of \$1.50 a year, that rate should be around \$43 for 2012, making a total rate of \$57.25. That's \$5.15 less a month than the district's \$62.40 projection. That's for the worst possible case. If we use the best case for financing the new plant, the 2012 rate would be around \$53.75, a savings of \$8.65 a month. Of course, the savings extend far beyond 2012.

It's clear that getting involved will save each customer thousands of dollars over the next 20 to 30 years. It happened because hundreds of you gave up a Wednesday night for a public meeting and took time to sign a petition. That was a critical first step. Next a small group invested hundreds of hours in research and attending meetings to present credible options to commissioners. We were heard and it will save us all a bunch of money.

What didn't happen is also noteworthy. For the most part, our local elected officials did nothing. The Village of Buckeye Lake did write a letter and a couple of officials spoke at the public meeting. But that was it - nothing at all from the three boards of township trustees involved (Union, Licking and Walnut townships) nor any follow-up from the Village of Buckeye Lake. What happened to our well-paid trustees?

The all-volunteer Buckeye Lake Area Civic Association did a lot more for sewer district customers than any of our paid local officials. If you aren't a member, it's time to join. Membership is just \$10 a year (\$25 for a business). Make your checks payable to BLACA and mail them to PO Box 1106, Buckeye Lake 43008. They deserve your financial support.



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Public records provide fodder for 'watchdog'

Editor:

Public records show that the Kirkersville Village Council passed an ordinance to make it unlawful to "park (or leave standing) any commercial vehicle, trailer, recreational vehicle or boat on any street, alley or right of way within the village limits at any time." Of course this does not apply to vehicles in use by "government, political subdivisions, or emergency services during performance of duties related to such government, political subdivision, or emergency services activities." In addition to this ordinance, they also passed legislation amending Chapter 452 of the code reading, "Continuous Parking in the Same Location." It sounds like one of our citizens (who owns a truck, trailer, RV or boat) has irritated the Kirkersville GOB (Good Ole Boys) and now they must pay - literally!

Speaking of paying, the village payroll for February 2007 was almost \$6,000. Excluding elected officials, the Village of Kirkersville employs seven people: one mayor's court clerk, three part-time police officers, one street employee, one solicitor and one magistrate. Don't forget that the elected officials voted themselves a raise which TRIPLED what they had been getting!

In addition, your tax dollars were used in February to pay for things such as: \$333.00 to Flying J for gasoline; \$799.60 to Columbia Gas; \$245.53 to the Computer Jerk, Bill Harper; \$120.75 to the Clerk's

Assistant, Ms. Tremblay; and \$764.97 to Best Buy (for a new computer - How much of a "degree" do you need to buy a new computer?!) In January, the Columbia Gas bill was \$625.92. That's almost \$1500.00 in gas bills in only two months!

On the other side, here are the most recent figures from Mayor's Court including two other neighboring villages.

Village	Population	
	2006 Total	January 2007
Buckeye Lake	3,049	
	\$48,737.80	\$3,581.00
Hebron	2,034	
	\$21,299.00	\$1,870.00
Kirkersville	520	
	\$47,536.00	\$2,796.00

Public records also show that one paid Kirkersville police officer has been "dismissed for non-compliance - he didn't show up for work." One police officer gets fuel, but a different officer signs the receipt and ALMOST NEVER do these officers put a date on their time card! The "date" is usually left blank. The time clock stamps only the month and day, not the year. I don't know how they are going to establish one year from the next when these records are filed. I would think the auditor's office will surely frown on this inability to accurately track hours worked.

Bonnie Mansfield
Kirkersville

More water for ODOT

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Eby also reported on a "major find" on inflow and infiltration. A 10-inch storm sewer was found connected to the sanitary sewer along Ohio 360. Eby said it will be disconnected this week. He said the Ohio Department of Transportation has been notified and will have to deal with the additional water.

Tim Weisert, a member of the customer group, expressed concern during Monday's meeting about the commitment of the district's consultant to obtaining the low interest loan from Ohio EPA. "We need to continue the focus on the low interest loan," he said. Customers would save some \$7-8

million dollars in interest cost with the one percent WPCLF loan, Weisert reminded commissioners.

"I don't think they (the consultant) are as optimistic," Commissioner Marcia Phelps said.

"We're doing all we can to secure the lower interest rate," Eby added.

Commission President Tim Bubb said about 10 applications have been received for the director's position. No interviews have been scheduled.

Customers will be receiving a letter explaining the rate increase and reminding them that another one will be required to retire the plant debt.