

2011 Public Information Meetings

During April and May 2011, the District held a series of public rate information meetings to present our customers with our proposed 2012-2016 rate schedule and affordability programs. The enclosed materials, prepared by the District's Communications & Community Relations (CCR) department, detail CCR's promotion of these meetings and audience input at the events:

- **Attendance, questions and comments by location**
- **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) and comments**
- **Promotion/advertisement of meetings by NEORS/CCR**
- **Sample newspaper advertisements (Plain Dealer)**

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

2011 Public Information Meetings: [Attendance, questions and comments by location](#)

Location: [Maple Heights Library](#)

Date: [April 6, 2011](#)

Attendance: [26](#)

Proposed Rates (Current and Proposed) and Billing

1. Why are you raising rates now?
2. What is a MCF?

CSO, Treatment Plants and Other Construction Projects

1. The Federal Government should help pay.
2. Wouldn't retention basins save money?
3. Why are we paying to get rid of combined sewers since they are a mistake made in the past?
4. My basement continually floods. Can you help me?

NEORSO Business Practices, Organizational Structure and Customer Service

1. Are you overstaffed?
2. I can't get Customer Service from the Water Department or your Sewer District to help me.

Corruption

1. What about accountability? How can we trust you with our money?
2. What are you going to do in the future to prevent corruption?

City of Cleveland Division of Water

1. Do you have confidence in the City of Cleveland billing system? Can we trust them to bill us correctly?
2. General confusion

Location: Beachwood Community Center
Date: April 11, 2011
Attendance: 18

Proposed Rates (Current and Proposed) and Billing

1. Why is the minimum charge removal not immediate?
2. Is what you presented (in the power point) the actual rates?
3. You have a captive group of customers that have no choice about this, right?
4. You are showing five years out. What will the rates be like beyond that point?
5. Is the population shrinking?
6. How is this rate increase going to affect businesses?
7. Will businesses be eligible for savings programs?
8. Are non profits billed the same as residents?

CSO, Treatment Plants and Other Construction Projects

1. Do you have a sense of how long we will be paying for CSOs?
2. Are there clean water milestones along the way which will tell us how we are doing (i.e., with Project Clean Lake)?
3. How are you going to balance Cleveland projects versus those in the suburbs?
4. When will we see changes in sewer overflows?
5. What is the volume of sewage treated from Cleveland versus the suburbs?

NEORS Business Practices, Organizational Structure and Customer Service

1. Do you have an audit? Where do you publish it?
2. Is there an authority that you answer to?
3. How many employees do you have?
4. How many cost overruns have we had since the new administration took over?
5. When was the District established?
6. Are you just now putting in a sewer system?
7. Is this the result of poor environmental stewardship over the years?
8. You mentioned spending 2 billion dollars. What was that used for?
9. Do you operate in the red?

Corruption

1. How much did the corruption cost us (i.e. Bill Schatz)?

Stormwater

1. What is the status of the lawsuit?

Location: Barlow Community Center - Hudson
Date: April 19, 2011
Attendance: 9

Proposed Rates (Current and Proposed) and Billing

1. How often do we receive a sewer bill?
2. Isn't it true that Summit County residents are not eligible for the Summer Sprinkling Discount?
3. What are the eligibility requirements for the Homestead program?
4. How can you continue to raise rates when everything is going up? We're getting hit from all sides. I'm on a fixed income. The EPA needs to balance environmental concerns with the economic reality.
5. Does this rate also apply to businesses?

CSO, Treatment Plants and Other Construction Projects

1. How much will this program cost?
2. How much does the Sewer District owe in fines for non-compliance with the Clean Water Act?
3. Didn't Southerly get flooded a few weeks ago and will this program (CSO) help prevent that from happening again?
4. When will this (CSO) program be complete?
5. Will this program separate all CSOs into separate sewers?
6. Aren't the suburbs paying for a problem that is largely in the city of Cleveland?
7. Are you funding infiltration programs?

Stormwater

1. Does this cost (CSO) include treating stormwater?

Location: Gunning Recreation Center
Date: April 26, 2011
Attendance: 115

Proposed Rates (Current and Proposed) and Billing

1. Why do seniors have to apply every year for homestead and summer sprinkling?
2. Do the people have a right to vote?
3. I don't see how increases can be justified.
4. How did we get to the point that we now need this?
5. Where is the money from the general fund going?
6. Where is this money going?
7. Who do I charge for my water barrel?
8. How much do you actually collect?
9. There are a lot of people out of work. What is going to happen when people just can't afford this?
10. What did you do with the extra money you collected by overcharging us (summer sprinkling problem)?
11. The poverty levels for the affordability programs should go up.
12. Too many people are asking us to pay more.
13. Can I apply for the Summer Sprinkling program?
14. Let me see the comparison slide again (with other cities).
15. Are other sewer districts nearby facing increases due to CSO's?
16. All utilities are trying to squeeze us.

CSO, Treatment Plants and Other Construction Projects

1. The EPA should be kicking in some money.
2. Why are you digging these holes all over the city?
3. Stop throwing money at the government.
4. How do you keep the infrastructure up?
5. What will stop EPA from going up again on what they want from us?
6. What proof do you have that we need three tunnels?
7. I live on Flamingo Street. Are we getting a new sewer?
8. The EPA is a bunch of liars. You have done too good a job in Lake Erie.
9. EPA is a governmental organization. Why are they doing this when the government has already frozen income for seniors?
10. Close the lake if it is polluted.
11. What would happen if we said no to the EPA?

NEORS Business Practices, Organizational Structure and Customer Service

1. How old is your latest facility?
2. We've lost 80,000 people in this area. Have you laid off people?
3. Where has the money you already spent gone?
4. Is the Sewer District run by a board?
5. Who is the District owned by?
6. Has the board gotten their pay frozen? Has anyone?
7. How many lawsuits do we have with Kassouf?
8. Do you maintain the sewers on the streets?

Stormwater

1. Are we getting charged for run-off from big buildings?
2. Has the EPA considered that we could be harming ourselves more with rain barrels? (mosquitoes)
3. Is there a rainwater tax?
4. Is that tax on its way?

Cleveland Division of Water

1. Water is having an increase right?
2. Bring the Water Department to the next meeting. When is it?
3. General confusion

Federal Funding and Outreach to Elected Officials

1. When have you talked to congresspersons?
2. When have you spoken with local congressmen?
3. Is there state help?
4. Have you talked to our representatives about how the older cities have built this country and now need help?

General

1. Thanks for coming out to talk to us.
2. NEORS has done a tremendous job with what they have.
3. We no longer sprinkle our lawns.
4. How much faith do we have in Ciaccia?
5. Where does Ciaccia work now?
6. What is Director Ciaccia's salary?

Location: Middleburg Heights Community Center
Date: May 4, 2011
Attendance: 315

Proposed Rates (Current and Proposed) and Billing

1. Rates are almost doubling between 2012 and 2016. What can you do to keep the rates the same?
2. I'm very angry and upset. This is a shell game you're playing (referring to our proposed Affordability Programs.) You take our money and nothing gets done.
3. Why don't we get a separate water and sewer bill anymore?
4. I live in Columbia Station and my sewer bills have quadrupled since we've been hooked up to NEORSD. Who decided that I have to get my sewer service from you? Who do I talk to in order to unhook from your service?
5. How did divorce become a crisis that would make someone eligible for a discount? Divorce is a choice, not a crisis. The stress you're putting everyone under with these increased rates is a crisis!
6. I've never lived anywhere where the sewer bills are so high. The timing of your rate increase is horrible.
7. If these are capital projects, can you take advantage of tax annuity bonds?
8. Where's all of the money going? Mismanagement is not our problem.

CSO, Treatment Plants and Other Construction Projects

1. How is the \$3 billion not a tax on rainwater?
2. Did the EPA do a cost-benefit analysis? Do you expect my tenants to absorb these increased sewer costs? If I charge too much, they won't rent, if I charge too little, I go broke. I can't afford to raise the rents in this economy. What can I do?
3. Who measured these big numbers? The 9 billion, 4.5 billion and etc.
4. At what point does the system not take the flow?
5. You've done a tremendous job designing sewers. The problem is the EPA pushing these regulations down our throats. Our lakes will become too clean if we're not careful.
6. What kind of benefits are we getting from these projects?
7. According to Cleveland State's Economic Impact Study for every \$1 we invest in the Sewer District, we will get \$2.63 in return. This is ridiculous.
8. Why should Middleburg Heights pay for the City of Cleveland's problems?
9. How do we know your financial projections are correct? Are you sure you just need \$3 billion and not more? What guarantees do we have?
10. Why am I paying for this construction? What percentage of rainwater goes into my dirt?
11. Other cities that are losing population are taking vacant properties and turning them into water catch basins. Are you considering any similar initiatives?
12. Can the bulk of the increase be attributed to this Consent Decree? Can't you take money from other large projects and use it for this work? What about the hi-speed rail Strickland wanted. Nobody wants to ride a train to Cincinnati. The government should be pitching in money. This is embarrassing.
13. I have a scientific question. Is some bacteria good?
14. Mayor Starr pushed one-year moratorium. Why didn't the Board vote for the one-year moratorium to further study the issue and get a better deal?
15. What happens if we just tell the EPA no?
16. If it took seven years to negotiate, why couldn't you wait one year longer?
17. What's the benefit of the CSO program?

NEORSD Business Practices, Organizational Structure and Customer Service

1. Who is paying for retirement, pensions and health care?
2. Why was Middleburg Heights part of NEORSD?

Corruption

1. I have no faith in your company. How can I trust you when there's been so much corruption?

Stormwater

1. Are we going to be billed for runoff from driveways and roads?
2. Is Parma Heights on the lawsuit?

City of Cleveland

1. How can you trust the City of Cleveland to do the billing? Nobody has any faith in them. You should resolve the billing issues first before raising the rates.
2. I can't begin to tell you the problems I have with your company.
3. Fix the billing problem with the Cleveland Division of Water and then come to us.

Federal Funding and Outreach to Elected Officials

1. The solution is you have to take this issue to the legislators. There needs to be a better funding formula.

General

1. I want to thank Gary Starr for standing up for us.

Location: Easterly Wastewater Treatment Plant
Date: May 14, 2011
Attendance: 11

Proposed Rates (Current and Proposed) and Billing

1. Is 1 MCF the minimum charge and do you plan to get rid of it?
2. What's the breakdown of why rates are going up?
3. Will you start another rate increase program in 2016?
4. Is there any chance the rates will go down?

CSO, Treatment Plants and Other Construction Projects

1. Is the Euclid Creek Tunnel part of this federally mandated program?
2. What other cities have had to sign a Consent Decree?
3. How soon do you expect to see water quality improvements at the East side beaches as a result of Project Clean Lake?
4. How long will the Euclid Creek Tunnel project last?
5. Would it be better if you push pollution further out into the lake?
6. How much is the Euclid Creek Tunnel project?
7. Are you taking water out of Euclid Creek?
8. What did you do to Shaw Brook on the south side of the Shoreway?
9. What is the condition of Nine Mile Creek?
10. When will the condition of Nine Mile Creek be addressed?
11. Do you have anything to do with removal of dams on Euclid Creek?

NEORSD Business Practices, Organizational Structure and Customer Service

1. Do you serve Willowick, Ohio?

General

1. Since the most expensive component of your program is treating solid wastes, you should recommend that your customers install composting toilets.

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

2011 Public Information Meetings: [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQ\) and comments](#)

1. Why is it necessary to raise rates?

There are three major reasons why a rate increase is necessary:

- We must repair, maintain, and upgrade our system and facilities. Some of the 300 miles of pipes we own and maintain are over 100 years old and require frequent maintenance.
- Our treatment plants not only require equipment maintenance and improvements, but we also experience rising costs of chemicals, energy and fuel, all of which are required to maintain the integrity of the treatment process.
- Rate increases will help us to further reduce sewage discharges into the environment by building storage tunnels to hold the flow until our treatment plants can clean the water. This effort is dubbed “Project Clean Lake” and is a federally-mandated program.

Investing in our infrastructure now will prevent more costly maintenance in the future.

2. Could the Sewer District refuse to comply with the EPA?

Not without costly consequences. The Sewer District is bound by the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to follow the law as prescribed in the Clean Water Act. If we had continued to violate the law, the EPA would have sued the Sewer District in federal court. As a result, the Sewer District would still have had to comply with the law, and may have been required to invest more than the \$3 billion we negotiated.

Additionally, instead of the 25 years negotiated with the EPA, the Sewer District may have been forced to complete the projects within a much shorter time frame adding to the cost. The EPA would have sought to charge us daily penalties and assess litigation fees, which customers would have to pay in the form of higher rate increases. We felt that this was an unnecessary risk and a potentially foolish decision for our customers. Additionally, we would have incurred about \$100 million per year in escalated construction costs for every year we delayed the program.

3. Are building tunnels the right solution?

Since about 1995, NEORS D has spent approximately \$45 million in engineering, legal and expert consultant fees in studying the problem and developing the plan to reduce raw sewage discharges. A wide-range of potential solutions, including downspout disconnection, sewer separation, sewer-rehabilitation/repair (e.g. lining), and many others, were studied prior to arriving at the recommended plan. Therefore, NEORS D believes that the final plan, of which large tunnels are an integral part, was thoroughly vetted and is the best solution.

Keep in mind that NEORS is also exploring the potential role of green infrastructure—wetlands, bioretention, and stormwater infiltration—to assist us in reducing the overall costs of our plan.

4. Before you ask customers for more money, shouldn't you address the problem with the City of Cleveland Division of Water first? How can we trust if bills are accurate?

Although the Sewer District and the City of Cleveland Division of Water are two separate entities, the Water Department handles our billing. We are very concerned about the billing issue and, not only have we expressed our concern, but are providing numerous resources to help fix the problem. We will continue to make those resources available until the problems are resolved.

5. Is federal or state funding available?

From 1972 through 1990, the Sewer District received \$555 million in grants. Between 1991 and 2005, through the appropriations process, the Sewer District received approximately \$91 million in State and Tribal Assistance Grants (STAG). The last grant received was for \$300,000 in 2009. Between 2009 and 2010, the Sewer District received approximately \$11.6 million in American Reinvestment and Recovery (ARRA/Stimulus) funding.

We continue to aggressively pursue federal and state funds, which are extremely limited. For example, in 2010, we submitted \$11.4 million worth of stream restoration and outfall repair projects under Water Resources Development Authority (WRDA) funding. In May 2011, the Sewer District submitted the same request, for \$10.4 million. However, we have not received any WRDA funding yet. For the past three years, we have submitted the Renewable Energy Facility for appropriations funding but have yet to receive any monies.

6. With the corruption at the Sewer District, how can we trust you with our money?

Over the past three years, the Sewer District's new administration has adopted several "checks and balances" to assure transparency and fiscal responsibility. We have changed-out the contracting terms and conditions that are used by NEORS for bidding construction, and we have much tighter control over the administration of those contracts.

For example:

Each month, the Director of Engineering and Construction provides a detailed report to the Board providing information on schedule, budget, and change orders for active treatment plant and/or sewer projects. These reports have documented that our construction projects are being completed on time and under budget; there has not been a cost overrun on a construction project over the last three years. This overview and other comprehensive financial reports are available to the public.

Other changes include:

- Executive Director’s report given at each Board meeting
- Four new Board committees formed—Audit, Finance, Governance, and Ad Hoc Ethics
- The Law Director now reports directly to the Executive Director and not the Board of Trustees as previously sanctioned
- A thorough and complete Ethics Policy was adopted

Furthermore, the Sewer District has sued contractors who were part of the corruption. This sends a strong message to other contractors that it’s no longer “business as usual” at the Sewer District.

7. Can you explain your structure?

The Sewer District is a political sub-division of the State of Ohio and is governed by its Board of Trustees. The Board consists of seven members—each of whom serves a five-year term—who are appointed as follows: (i) two by the Mayor of the City of Cleveland; (ii) two by council of governments (the "Suburban Council") comprised of representatives of all the suburban communities served by the system; (iii) one by the Board of County Commissioners of Cuyahoga County; (iv) one by the appointing authority of the subdistrict with the greatest sewage flow (currently the Mayor of the City of Cleveland); (v) and one by the appointing authority of the subdistrict with the greatest population (currently the Suburban Council). Accordingly, the Mayor of the City of Cleveland and Suburban Council each currently appoint three members of the Board.

8. Can you explain your proposed rate-saving programs?

In addition to the two current rate-savings programs—“Summer Sprinkling” and Homestead—the Sewer District is proposing two new affordability programs to further assist customers during tough economic times. The Wastewater Affordability Program will offer a discounted rate to low-income households and the Crisis Voucher Program will temporarily assist customers with their sewer bills if they are impacted by job loss or medical expenses.

9. What cost-cutting measures have you taken?

The Sewer District’s staffing levels have decreased from 717 employees 1989 to 617 today, a 14% decrease.

Also, since Executive Director Julius Ciaccia assumed his current position in 2007, we have undergone three extensive audits—including audits by two law firms and the State of Ohio—and implemented several new policies and procedures. Most significant are changes to our Engineering and Construction department. Since 2007, all construction projects have been “on time and on budget.” In fact, the Sewer District has asked the Board of Trustees for zero contract change orders since 2007.

10. Are the suburbs paying for Cleveland's problem?

The Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District is a true regional entity in that we serve all or part of 62 communities in four counties. Projects that directly impact one community or region are paid for using rates collected throughout the region. Examples may include construction of a new interceptor sewer to benefit suburban communities, improvements to one of our treatment plants, or upgrades to eliminate a combined sewer outfall. All of these improvements improve the quality of Lake Erie, the source of drinking water for most of our customers.

11. Does the rate increase include stormwater?

No. Project Clean Lake and the Stormwater Management Program are two separate programs.

The Sewer District is still planning to implement the new Stormwater Management Program, but it is not yet in place. This program will work to reduce flooding, streambank erosion and water quality problems throughout our region. The Sewer District will assume maintenance responsibilities for assets along the regional stream network as well as design and implement construction projects to help manage stormwater throughout our service area.

12. How many customers benefit from the affordability programs?

At present, approximately 123,740 customers participate in the Sewer District's "Summer Sprinkling" program where customers are billed for summer usage based on actual winter month consumption. In addition, 18,572 customers currently qualify for (and participate in) our Homestead program. These two programs will continue in 2012.

Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District

2011 Public Information Meetings:

Promotion/advertisement of meetings by NEORSD/CCR

To publicize all six public meetings over a six-week period, we spent **\$39,278.26**. In addition to paid advertisements for each public meeting, we took full advantage of social media—including Facebook and Twitter—to further promote the meetings.

Print advertisements

- Plain Dealer
- Sun News
- Akron Beacon Journal
- Cleveland Jewish News
- Call + Post
- News Leader (Macedonia)
- Hudson Hub Times
- West Side Leader (Richfield)

Radio

- MetroNetworks (multiple stations)
 - 102.1 WDOK, 107.9 WENZ, 95.5 WFHM, 850 WKNR, 92.3 WKRK, 98.5 WNCX, 107.3 WNWV, 104.1 WQAL, 93.1
- Total Traffic Network (ClearChannel Cleveland)
 - Majic 105.7, WTAM 1100, 99.5 WGAR, 106.5 The Lake, 100.7 WMMS and 96.5 Kiss FM
- WCPN (ideastream)

Fliers were mailed and/or emailed to many organizations, including

- City Halls / Village Halls
- COG Members
- Community Centers
- Religious Organizations
- Senior Centers

Media Stories

- *Regional sewer district proposes rate hike, doing away with minimum charge* – Plain Dealer (3/18)
- *Feagler & Friends* – WVIZ (4/18)
- *Public Meetings Scheduled for Proposed Sewer Rate Hike* – WCPN (4/8)
- *Public Meeting scheduled Monday for proposed sewer rate hike* – Channel 5 (4/8)
- *Proposed Sewer Rate Changes to Be Discussed in Beachwood Tonight* – Beachwood Patch (4/11)

THE PLAIN DEALER

SUNDAY, APRIL 10, 2011

METRO

B | THE PLAIN DEALER  BREAKING NORTHEAST OHIO NEWS AT CLEVELAND.COM/METRO

Commentary

REGINA BRETT



Officer in fatal bar shooting

Stuck selling home

Your Sewer District... **Keeping our Great Lake great.**

RATE INFORMATION PUBLIC MEETINGS

LEARN MORE about us, upcoming rate changes, affordability programs, and more:

- WEDNESDAY 4/6 @ 7-8:30p | MAPLE HEIGHTS**
Maple Heights Library, 5225 Library Ln.
- MONDAY 4/11 @ 7-8:30p | BEACHWOOD**
Beachwood Recreation Center, 25325 Fairmount Blvd.
- TUESDAY 4/19 @ 7-8:30p | HUDSON**
Barlow Community Center, 41 S. Oviatt St.
- TUESDAY 4/26 @ 7-8:30p | CLEVELAND**
Gunning Park Rec Center, 16700 Puritas Ave.
- WEDNESDAY 5/4 @ 7-8:30p | MIDDLEBURG HEIGHTS**
Middleburg Hts. Community Center, 16000 Bagley Rd.
- SATURDAY 5/14 @ 9-10:30a | CLEVELAND**
Easterly Wastewater Treatment Plant,
14021 Lakeshore Blvd.

 **Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District**

DATES AND TIMES SUBJECT TO CHANGE. CHECK ONLINE FOR UPDATES:



neorsd.org



yoursewerdistrict



@neorsd

 **Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District**

RATE INFORMATION PUBLIC MEETING

MONDAY 4/11 @ 7pm

Beachwood Rec Center
25325 Fairmount Blvd.

CHECK ONLINE FOR THE LATEST DETAILS



facebook.com/yoursewerdistrict

 **Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District**

RATE INFORMATION PUBLIC MEETING

TONIGHT 4/19 @ 7pm

Barlow Community Center
41 South Oviatt St., Hudson

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