

Sewer rates to increase in Lowellville

By **DAN POMPILI**
Staff writer

LOWELLVILLE — Increasing costs have made wastewater treatment more expensive, and the village will have to pass the costs on to customers.

Mayor Jim Iudiciani said residents and businesses in Lowellville and Poland Township served by the Republic Services plant will see an increase in their Aqua Ohio sewer bills beginning in January.

"Republic has always paid for at least 60% of the costs of maintenance and upgrades at the plant, but that's just not the case anymore," he said.

Iudiciani said the Ohio EPA has mandated several new upgrades to be made over the next five years and a pump station needs to be installed on McGaffney Road to manage the leachate from the landfill and methane gas wells in the township on its way to the treatment plant.

The village's roughly 450 residents have for years paid a flat rate of \$20, with \$5 worth of that paying for stormwater management. The rate will now increase by \$5 annually, reaching \$35 in 2027. Township residents have been paying \$32, and that also will increase by \$5 annually over the next three years.

Apartment buildings will begin paying \$45 in

January and it will reach \$55 in 2027.

The flat rate for commercial 1-zoned businesses will go up to \$33, for commercial 2 to \$44 and for commercial 3 to \$46.20. For industrial businesses with fewer than 50 employees, the rate will be \$136.13 per 50,000 gallons treated, and for those with more than 50 employees the rate will be \$198 per 50,000 gallons.

The rate will be \$300 for schools and \$800 for metropolitan housing complexes.

The new pump station, which will go in next year, under the Norfolk Southern Railroad tracks along the left side of the hill on McGaffney, will cost about \$900,000 but Iudiciani said that has been completely paid for by grants.

He said former Congressman Tim Ryan helped the village obtain a \$548,000 federal OEPA grant, and the village also applied for and won \$225,000 from the Ohio Public Works Commission and \$115,000 from the Appalachian Regional Commission.

He said the pump station will still come with utility and maintenance costs that the village will have to cover at least

partially.

He said the greatest costs are still the maintenance and upgrades to the aging treatment plant.

For example, a new equalization tank could cost \$5 million.

"The EPA is getting more strict on our permit for discharge into the river," he said. "But also it's that the plant's getting old now and there's so much cost just to maintain the lines. We're having to clean them out three or four times a year."

Iudiciani said the village asked Aqua, which the village pays 8% for billing, to conduct a study to see if residents would save money on metered usage.

"It wasn't really going to make a difference," he said. "The \$5 increase, that will generate only about \$25,000 per year, but we have to start somewhere."

He said Lowellville also will continue to apply for grants to offset costs.

"We've looked at selling our treatment plant to private industry and it's not conducive to serving our residents, because residents would be paying at least four times more," he said. "It would be way over \$100 a month."

One problem the village has, Iudiciani said, is residents who don't pay their sewer bills.

"We lien their property, and if they want to sell their house, they have to pay that lien off first, but that's the only action we can take right now," he said. "There is legislation at the state level that may help."

He said some of that legislation would change the law to allow municipalities to shut off water for non-payment of sewer bills.

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