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Mayor voices concerns with Summit's storm water management fee

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by Emily Canning-Dean | Reporter

Twinsburg -- Mayor Katherine Procop opposes a proposed countywide storm water management plan that would cost homeowners around \$12 a year for the next two years and raise between \$5 million and \$6 million for mitigation projects throughout the county.

Procop voiced her concerns with the proposal in a letter dated Dec. 22 to the county engineer's department, stating that property owners would pay a fee for projects that do not address any of the city's concerns.

"Water that originates in the Tinkers Creek Watershed does not flow into any other sub-watersheds in Summit County," Procop wrote. "If a user fee is to be implemented the fee should be for a service provided to those paying the fees or for land impacted by the water from those areas paying the fee.

"Considering the investments that the city and residents have made to protect the watershed and alleviate flooding, I am recommending that the residents and businesses in the city of Twinsburg not be subjected to the proposed stormwater fees."

In certain Twinsburg subdivisions where storm water detention basins or other improvements were required for development, property owners are already paying for storm water management as part of homeowner association fees, she said.

She also stated that Twinsburg residents are currently paying a bond levy for the purchase of 900 acres of open space along Liberty Road that includes portions of Pond Brook. Procop said the city has spent a total of \$14 million for land acquisition to protect riparian corridors and reduce the amount of impervious area in the watershed.

Council President Ted Yates said he agrees that it would be unfair to impose these fees on Twinsburg property owners.

"The city has gone above and beyond to address the watershed," he said.

Summit County Engineer Alan Brubaker said he believes Twinsburg would benefit from projects funded by these fees.

"During interviews conducted ... earlier this year regarding the storm water draft proposal, Twinsburg had mentioned that it is receiving surface water runoff from neighboring communities," said Brubaker, adding that these funds would be used to address such problems.

Brubaker also said that by being part of the storm water management plan, the city could continue to improve watershed and water quality issues.

"It is clear that Twinsburg has made admirable progress with regard to flood mitigation," he said. "It is also clear that some of these projects would be regarded as regional, and therefore would be considered as candidates to receive funding from the proposed utility," he said. "This funding is intended to complement the city's ongoing efforts, not to override or replace them."

Under the proposed plan, property owners would be charged \$1 per month for every 3,000 square feet of impervious surface area, such as pavement or a roof. The plan calls for the fee to increase to \$3 per month after two years unless Summit County Council approves a different rate.

The proposal is based on a \$46,000 study conducted by the Joint Center for Policy Research of Lorain County Community College's Public Services Institute. Heidi Swindell, spokesperson for the Summit County Engineer's Office, said a study draft was circulated among county communities for feedback last spring through the Summit County Mayors Association and the Township Association of Summit County. The proposal was then given to the communities for further feedback in November.

Swindell said there is no timeline established for the approval of this plan, but added that Summit County Council would conduct public hearings before voting on the matter.

Procop said she plans to attend those public hearings and encourages property owners to attend and write to the county engineer's office if they have questions or comments.

"Now is the time to weigh in on this issue," she said.

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