

December 22, 2008

Storm-water runoff fee mulled

Hearing, vote set for Jan. 6

By Andrea Uhde

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Oldham County leaders soon will decide whether to charge homeowners \$46.92 next year for projects related to storm-water runoff.

Fiscal Court will have a public hearing on Jan. 6 and vote on the proposed fee, which home and business owners throughout Oldham -- except in the La Grange and Pewee Valley city limits -- would have to pay as soon as February or March.

After a year, the rate would be reviewed and could be adjusted, said Kevin Eldridge, chairman of a committee that was tasked with setting a rate.

The money would pay for projects including mapping and protecting waterways throughout the county to help meet a federal mandate that stems from the 1973 Clean Water Act.

The rules already have been imposed on larger cities including Louisville, and the Environmental Protection Agency and the Kentucky Division of Water are now starting to enforce it in Oldham and 98 other communities in Kentucky.

In Oldham, La Grange and Pewee Valley plan to address the mandate on their own.

Some Oldham officials said they fear fines if they don't meet the mandate. Oldham this year received its first notice of violation for not meeting the mandate.

"We cannot afford to pay the kinds of fines" other communities have had to pay, Judge-Executive Duane Murner said.

Oldham started working on ordinances to address storm-water flow about six years ago, and this year Fiscal Court formed the Storm Water Management District to address paying for the work required in those ordinances.

Eldridge said a rate of \$3.91 a month, or \$46.92 a year, is "a good, safe harbor number for one year." After that, they will review the budget and see whether to change the rate. Weeks ago, the committee had been considering a \$60 annual fee, but Eldridge said they made several cuts in the budget since then.

The rate is based on the average amount of hard surface, such as concrete and blacktop, on a residential property. Businesses and multifamily units with more hard surface would be billed more, depending on their size.

Magistrate Scott Davis said he still thinks the rate could be cut by one-third or more. He said he's concerned there is money in the budget for construction-site runoff and post-construction runoff, which he thinks could be paid with fees paid by developers.

County Engineer Beth Stuber said her department is supported by erosion control fees that developers pay, and that will help support the program.

Buckner resident Dewey Wotring said he sees the proposed fee as a tax, and he's concerned that some of it will relieve the general fund.

"I really suggest the magistrates look at this very closely," he said.

Reporter Andrea Uhde can be reached at (502) 582-4663.

Additional Facts

What's next

Public hearing on proposed storm-water utility fee

When: 6 p.m., Jan. 6

Where: Fiscal Court building, 100 West Jefferson St., La Grange

Information: www.oldhamcounty.net
