

THE CORD REPORT

The Official Quarterly Newsletter of CORD



MORE STORIES INSIDE:

- The 134th Ohio General Assembly: First Year in Review - 2
- Spotlight on Associate Members - 4
- Social Media & Regional Districts - 5
- Customer Affordability Program at NEORS - 7
- Knowing the CORD Board - 9
- Bits and Pieces from CORD - 12

CORD

1086 N. 4th St., Suite 105
Columbus, Ohio 43201

CORDOHIO.ORG

Contact Our Staff

Larry Long, Director of Membership
Development: larrylong@cordohio.org

Catina Taylor, Executive Assistant:
catina.taylor@alberslaw.com

OHIO MAKES MASSIVE INVESTMENT IN WATER INFRASTRUCTURE THROUGH THE NEW "OHIO BUILDS" INITIATIVE

Written by Andrew Huffman
Director of Legislative Affairs
Governmental Policy Group

134th General Assembly

A new Ohio program created by the Ohio legislature and administered by the DeWine Administration is giving Ohio's water and wastewater systems access to much needed infrastructure siprojects with nearly \$44 million in financial support. The first two rounds of funding have included projects in all 88 Counties, as shown in the following map.



Funding for the program was made available through the passage of HB 168 earlier this year, which used \$250 million from Ohio's portion of the federal American Rescue Plan Act (APRA) funding. The Coalition of Ohio Regional Districts (CORD) helped spearhead the advocacy efforts behind the funding proposal and had been urging legislators and the



DeWine Administration to use Ohio's federal COVID-19 relief funding on Ohio's water and wastewater infrastructure needs. The program is administered by the Ohio Department of Development, which over the summer was charged with accepting applications and ranking projects. Over \$1.4 billion in projects were submitted by over 1200 water and wastewater systems.

Governor DeWine promoted the Ohio BUILDS program as a way to reduce or eliminate the local financial burden associated with crucial infrastructure needs. The grants were also awarded to projects that prevented sewer system backups and replace failing household sewage treatment systems with new sewers. Ohio BUILDS will also focus on supporting targeted solutions that impact quality of life such as broadband expansion, brownfield redevelopment, the demolition of blighted buildings, and more.

In unveiling the Ohio BUILDS initiative, Governor DeWine said: "These grants are about strengthening our future, our people, and our communities. We want our kids and grandkids to stay in Ohio, and clean water is essential to the health and future of our state. Protecting and ensuring that every community in Ohio has access to safe and clean water has been our mission from the start, and with these grants, we are continuing our mission to provide access to economic development tools that will help communities grow and thrive well into the future."

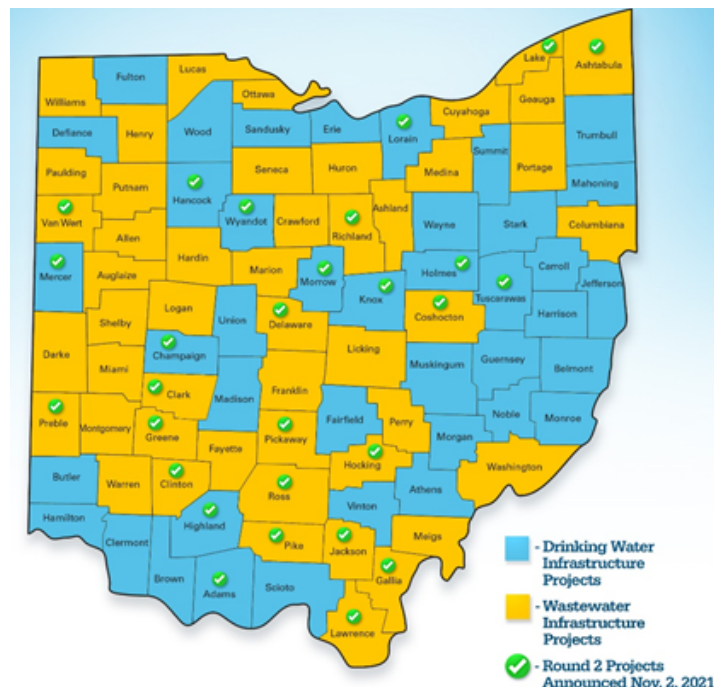
This could mark the first wave of a significant investment in the state's water and sewer infrastructure needs. Through ARPA, Ohio will receive an additional \$2.7 billion in 2022 in COVID-19 relief funding, which could be utilized to make another investment in the Ohio BUILDS program. Additionally, the state could see another influx of funding with the passage of the federal bipartisan Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, which was signed by President Biden in November.



The \$1.2 trillion infrastructure bill will send billions of dollars to Ohio over the next five years, including \$1.4 billion through the Clean Water State Revolving Fund and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund programs. This will help finance critical water infrastructure projects throughout the state, including stormwater management and upgrades to water and wastewater treatment systems. The bill also provides funding to address per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS) and for lead service line replacement to help ensure communities in Ohio and across the country have access to clean, safe drinking water. Additionally, the bill provides funding for the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative.

As we look ahead, Ohio's lawmakers are working to wrap up their business before breaking for the winter holidays in December. Much attention the past few months have been given to the Ohio Redistricting Commission, which was charged with redrawing Ohio's House and Senate Districts. Its plan, which was passed along a party-line vote, is currently being challenged in the Ohio Supreme Court. Additionally, the Ohio legislature recently passed a plan to redraw Ohio's Congressional Districts. Since neither plan received bipartisan support, they will only take effect for four years, as opposed to 10-year maps. The 2022 legislative schedules for the House and Senate were recently released and it promises to be a very active legislative agenda when lawmakers return in 2022. Lawmakers are scheduled to be in session until June at which point they will break for summer recess before the 2022 General Election. The 2022 election will be extremely important to Ohio, as voters will select a new U.S. Senator. Additionally, all 15 Congressional seats are on the ballot as are all statewide elected offices. All 99 Ohio House seats and half of the Ohio Senate seats will also appear before voters.

CORD members are encouraged to communicate concerns on pending legislation and administrative rules which are regularly sent from the CORD office. We are also always looking for experienced officials to testify at hearings in the General Assembly. CORD not only works in response to legislative proposals pending in the Legislature, but regularly develops a Legislative Program to address needed changes in state laws to make the work of Districts more streamlined and effective. We hope to hear from you. CORD will continue to advocate on behalf of Ohio's regional water and sewer districts before Ohio's elected officials and will keep its members apprised of any developments that will impact their operations.



SPOTLIGHT ON CORD'S ASSOCIATE MEMBERS



John Albers
john.albers@alberslaw.com



Chris Coble
ccoble@eagonic.com



Engineers • Architects • Planners

Alex White
awhite@grwinc.com



Alan Brown
abrown@hullinc.com



Kip Wahlers
kip.wahlers@icemiller.com



Ted Bennett
tbennett@jheng.com



Joe Pheil
joe@ohioruralwater.com



Sherry O'Brien
sobrien@smartbillcorp.com



Karen Steele
ksteele@mysoftwaresolutions.com



Rex Huffman
rhuffman@spitlerhuffmanlaw.com

SOCIAL MEDIA AND REGIONAL DISTRICTS: IMPROVING CUSTOMER SERVICE IN THE FUTURE

Written by Tay Sauer

Intern, Northwestern Water & Sewer District

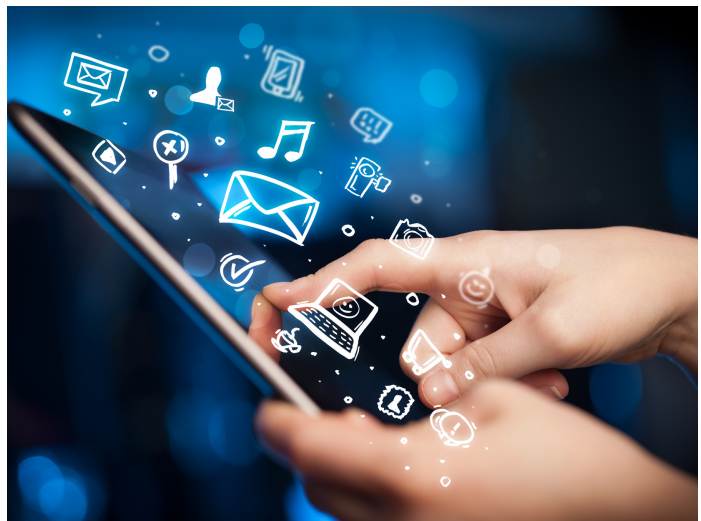


Increasingly, water, sewer, and stormwater districts are embracing digital technology and are using social media platforms to communicate to their customers about the services they provide. When it comes to digital technology, digital fluency is typically measured by dividing people into two categories: digital natives and digital immigrants. Digital natives were born with technology as a part of their daily lives; the oldest digital natives used VHS and cassette tape players, dial up internet, and land lines. The youngest digital natives grew up with multiple devices at their fingertips: tablets, smartphones, gaming systems, and more. Digital immigrants, on the other hand, grew up before the technology boom. Typically, Baby Boomers and Generation X are considered digital immigrants and Millennials, Generation Z, and Generation Alpha are considered digital natives. This year, the oldest digital native is 41. Technology and social media are not just for kids and teenagers anymore; in fact, social media usage among older adults is growing faster than any other age group.

Social media usage in adults 65+ grew from 37% in 2018 to 45% in 2021. In adults aged 50-64, social media usage grew from 64% to 73%. Population-wise, in the United States, 2020 was the first year that digital natives outnumbered digital immigrants. However, this isn't just an issue of age. Rural areas, which were initially slow to adopt digital technologies and social media, have jumped from 59% usage in 2018 to 67% in 2021.

Unfortunately, traditional outlets like newspaper and radio are declining. In order to combat this, many radio and newspaper outlets have pivoted to a digital platform. Almost all newspapers have websites and social media channels of their own. So, what does this mean for you and your district? It means that you and your utility are now your own newsroom. Your website

is essentially your own personal front page. Keep in mind that your website is also a reflection of your utility. If it's hard to navigate, messy, and not frequently updated, what are your customers going to think of your ability to provide quality service? You may be the most capable water or sewer service provider in Ohio, but if your website or Facebook page is just a messy afterthought, does that convey your quality of service? On the other hand, if your hours and contact info are easily accessible, important and relevant info front and center, and everything is neat and organized, what impression does that make to your customers?





Another thing to keep in mind is that you're able to put out important information on social media sites as well, and people will view it as factual as if they were reading it out of a newspaper. Many local news outlets and government organizations from local to federal levels are able to tweet news from their verified accounts on Twitter to reach a larger audience.

A good example of the impact of social media occurred last year when Governor Mike DeWine announced that schools would be closed for 3 weeks for spring break to slow the spread of COVID-19. Gov. DeWine's tweets got hundreds of thousands of

"hits" because local news outlets, public officials' school social media accounts, and parents shared these tweets so that their followers would see it. The first news article written about the Governor's order was posted at 3:46pm. By that time, the tweets already had over 125,000 "hits" within only 1 hour after it was posted. When President Biden announced that Juneteenth would be a federal holiday, there was no press release and no statement on the White House website at first. However, there was a tweet and a livestream of the signing of the order from the official White House Twitter account.

It's not uncommon for people to feel a little freaked out when they hear that Twitter is now seen as a source of news content, and understandably so. There's a lot of misinformation on social media as anyone can post pretty much anything. But you don't need to worry about misinformation because that's not what you'll be posting. In fact, that's why you're there: to refute it. Unlike newspapers, radio, or television, social media is a two-way street of communication. People are able to comment on your posts and ask questions or state their opinion. This is not something to be afraid of. In fact, look at it as an opportunity to create a relationship with your customers and stop rumors and misinformation before they spread.

So, what's coming next is the rapidly changing world of digital communications and social media? According to a Cisco study, by 2022, 82% of all online content will be video based. Also related to video, Tik-tok is on track to surpass Instagram, Twitter, and Snapchat in active users by 2022. In addition, technology adoption will be at an all-time high. As we saw with our statistics earlier, more and more people are embracing social media as a regular part of their daily lives regardless of age, gender, or location. During the worst part of the pandemic, we all got used to communicating digitally and holding meetings using on-line technologies. Even now as we are beginning to return to normal, the skills we learned and habits we've formed when technology was our only option are here to stay and can benefit our Districts and their customers if meticulously designed and managed.



CUSTOMER AFFORDABILITY PROGRAM EXPANDED AT NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT

Written by Jeannie Carroll

Senior Manager - Communications and Community Relations
Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District



As the urgent need to maintain and improve our wastewater and stormwater systems continue to be a priority, the Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (Sewer District) Board of Trustees this summer passed an annual rate increase of 4.2 percent for 2022-2026 rate cycle. The rate increase will help to fund, in part, the 24/7/365 work of the Sewer District's plant operations as well as funding stormwater and sewer projects designed to protect public health and improve our region's waterways.

"For nearly 50 years, the Sewer District has invested \$5 billion in sewer and stormwater projects. Our early work included restoring the Cuyahoga River through sewer investments, which significantly reduced the amount of pollution making its way to the river," said Kyle Dreyfuss-Wells, Sewer District Chief Executive Officer. "The work, however, does not stop. Our community's 330 miles of regional sewer pipes, 3 wastewater treatment plants, and 476 miles of regional streams requires continual maintenance and care to ensure we protect public health and the freshwater quality on which our region relies. We must also build and maintain new infrastructure to address the region's legacy of combined sewer overflows and significant flooding and erosion problems that threaten public safety."



"As part of the 2022-2026 rate cycle, the Sewer District made it a priority to increase the number of customers eligible for the Sewer District's cost-saving programs, specifically, the Affordability Program. As a result, changes to eligibility requirements include adding renters whose sewer and water bills are in their name, as well as increasing the income threshold for the Affordability Program from 200 percent of poverty to 250 percent of poverty. Both changes would increase program eligibility to an additional 40,000 customers.

"The Sewer District has offered cost-saving programs for several decades, adding a new program, the Crisis Voucher Program, in 2012, so that those facing a hardship could get some relief. Additionally, the Sewer District added stormwater credits in 2013, providing a reduction in stormwater fees," said Constance Haqq, Chief Administrative Officer for NEORS.

"However, as a national leader on this important topic, we

recognized that more needed to be done and we have done more as a US Water Alliance partner on the Water Equity Task Force. We continue to participate in the affordability discussion locally through the Greater Cleveland Water Equity Task Force, developing a roadmap to identify problems and develop solutions to ensure clean, freshwater for all, regardless of income."

The Sewer District continues its outreach to customers, elected officials, and media regarding the cost-saving programs, including educating stakeholders about the latest additions to the affordability program. The goal is to sign up 10,000 additional eligible customers for its cost-saving programs by the end of 2026. The newest affordability eligibility additions will be effective January 1, 2022.

"We want to make certain that every eligible customer is not only aware of our programs but applies to receive much-needed savings," said Haqq. "That is a Sewer District priority in 2022 and beyond."

EDITOR'S NOTE

Affordability is always an issue of critical importance to Regional Districts in the provision of water, sewer, and stormwater services to customers. Often a difficult issue for the governing boards of Regional Districts to grapple with, the statutory basis for affordability programs is contained in ORC Section 6119.091, which reads as follows:

When fixing rentals or other charges under section 6119.09 of the Revised Code, a board of trustees of a regional water and sewer district may establish discounted rentals or charges or may establish another mechanism for providing a reduction in rentals or charges. If the board does so, the board shall establish eligibility requirements for such discounted or reduced rentals or charges, including a requirement that a person be eligible for the homestead exemption or qualify as a low- and moderate-income person.

This section of Ohio law was originally enacted in 2009 but was amended during the 133rd General Assembly by both H.B. 166 and H.B. 7, with the current change in the law effective October 17, 2019.

Look for additional members of the Board of Directors to be featured in future issues.



MEET JOHN SIMPSON

General Manager, Le-Ax Water District

John Simpson has been the General Manager of the Le-Ax Regional Water District for 14 years. The District derives its name from Lee and Alexander Townships in western Athens County. Le-Ax was formed in 1968 to supply safe drinking water to the Village of Albany and 250 families in the surrounding area. Following steady growth during its first three decades a new water treatment facility was opened in 1997.



Today Le-Ax serves the Village of Albany and nearly 7,000 customers (20,000 residents) in 17 townships in Athens, Hocking, Meigs, and Vinton counties. Le-Ax's two collector wells pull water from the Hocking River Aquifer and can produce up to 8.5 mg/d. Treatment of raw water includes iron and manganese removal, filtration, softening, fluoride enhancement and chlorine disinfection and can treat 2.8 mg/d. The system includes 750 miles of water line, seven pumping stations, and 12 tank sites. The District budgets approximately \$3.7 Million annually and John manages a staff of 16 employees.

John grew up in Stewart, an unincorporated area in Athens County, and went to Federal Hocking High School. He and his high school sweetheart, Carol, have been married for 40 years and are the proud parents of two married sons. They have a beautiful red-headed little granddaughter, Gwendolyn Kay, who has stolen John and Carol's hearts. They anxiously await their second grandchild in the spring of 2022.

Prior to joining Le-Ax John had already completed another career and brought his management and supervisory skills with him. For 27 years, John worked for McBee Systems in Athens where he worked himself up from a worker on the production floor to the Director of Operations, overseeing production in Ohio, Virginia, Utah, and Georgia. McBee was a printing company (originally McBee Binder Co, formed in 1906 and later acquired by Deluxe Corporation) specializing in business checks, forms, labels, receipt books, and similar products. John had a short stint as Plant Manager at the Damascus, Virginia plant, otherwise, he has called Athens County his home. McBee closed operations in Athens in 2006 where over 350 jobs were lost. John joined Le-Ax part-time in 2005 as Assistant General Manager transitioning to full-time in 2006 and becoming General Manager in 2007.

John has been on the CORD Board for six years. He has also been active in the Ohio Rural Water Association (ORWA), where he now serves as Vice President and Chair of the Legislative Committee. John received the Ohio Rural Water Manager of the Year Award in 2012 from ORWA and is the 2017 recipient of the John Wolfe Award, the organization's most coveted award. In 2014 Le-Ax received first place as the "Best Tasting Rural Water in Ohio".

John is the recipient of a Business Management Certificate from Tulane University; a Utility Management Certification from the National Rural Water Association; and has completed various leadership development and management programs from the American Management Institute. He holds an Ohio EPA Class II Water Distribution License and is a member of the Athens County Local Emergency Planning Committee (LEPC) and The Buckeye Hills Regional Council of Governments.

MEET JERRY GREINER

President, Northwestern Water & Sewer District

Overseeing one of the larger Chapter 6119 Regional Water and Sewer Districts in Ohio, Jerry Greiner is the President of the Northwestern Water and Sewer District (The District) headquartered north of Bowling Green Ohio. The District was organized in 1994 to take over the water and sewer operations of the Wood County Commissioners and Sanitary Engineer. The District provides water and sewer services in in Wood, Henry, Hancock, and Sandusky counties.

The Northwestern Water & Sewer District is governed by a 10 member Board for three year terms and has over 75 employees. The Board is composed of 3 appointed by Wood County Commissioners, 1 appointed by Henry County, 3 township representatives, and 3 municipal representatives.. The District boasts 20,000 customer accounts and an annual operating and capital budget in excess of \$55 Million. Booked assets total in excess of \$230 Million. The District distributes 6.5 Million Gallons of water and moves or treats 5.5 Million Gallons of wastewater daily.

Jerry grew up in Wood County and graduated from North Baltimore High School. He attended Bowling Green State University where he received a BS in Marketing & Management in 1980. Upon graduation he tried his hand at community banking and became Vice President of Mid American Bank, where he managed 4 offices with \$50 Million in assets and 100 until 1988. Jerry then joined The District as Business Manager, becoming President in 1991. His 33 years with The District has been a time of significant growth., and Jerry still has much he wishes to achieve before he decides to “hang it up”. Jerry, his wife, and two daughters live in Bowling Green, Ohio.



NORTHWESTERN
THE DISTRICT
WATER & SEWER



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MEET JODI WOODS

Administrative Manager, Rural Lorain County Water Authority

After 32 years with the Rural Lorain County Water Authority (RLCWA), Jodi is one of the longest serving and more experienced members of the CORD, having served over ten years on the CORD Board. Before assuming her current position Jodi worked at several different positions for RLCWA which gave her a broad understanding of the history and operations of the Authority.



Jodi grew up in eastern Huron County in the Village of Wakeman and was a “Roughrider” at Western Reserve High School before attending Bowling Green State University. The Authority was organized in 1974 upon a petition from sixteen townships and two villages. Prior to its establishment residents of southern Lorain County and surrounding areas were unable to depend upon ground water or other sources of potable water and thus relied upon cisterns, individual wells, and tank deliveries to supply their water needs. Today the 680 square mile system serves twenty-eight townships, six villages, and one city primarily in Lorain County with over five million gallons a day of water. The source of the water is from the Avon Lake Regional Water Authority, the Village of New London, and the City of Ashland. The board is comprised of twenty-six members, twenty-two from townships and four municipal representatives. Joe Waldecker is the General Manager of the District.

Jodi spends her spare time with her family, traveling boating, and snowmobiling. Jodi has been married to her husband, Chris Woods, for 8 years. He works at his family's meat market in Amherst. Chris enjoys cooking on his Big Green Egg smoker; he also relaxes with wood working, hunting, and fishing. Jodi's stepdaughter Ashley, 36, is married to Stephen and they live in Oberlin, Ohio. Ashley works as a vet assistant and owns Moore Show Horses. Stephen works at the steel mill. They have a miniature pony and donkey and two dachshunds, Sadie and Logan. Jodi's oldest son Ian, 23, lives in Huron and is the owner of Erie Garage Door and sub-contracts for Harbor Door. Twenty-one-year-old son Logan is serving his country as a crew chief in the US Air Force, stationed in Spokane, Washington. Both boys love collecting and shooting their guns and are avid fans of the Irish of Notre Dame. Fluffy, the true ruler of the house is their beloved 16-year-old cat.



**CHECK OUT THE NEXT EDITION FOR
MORE DIRECTOR FEATURES!**

BITS AND PIECES FROM CORD

Things you may have missed... and may want to know...

Written by Larry Long, CORD Director of Membership Development

State Minimum Wage to Increase in 2022

The Ohio Department of Commerce (DOC) has issued a reminder that the state minimum wage will increase to \$9.30/hr. for non-tipped employees and \$4.65/hr. for tipped employees in 2022. This applies to employees of businesses with annual gross receipts of over \$342,000/yr. The current minimum wage is \$8.80 for non-tipped employees and \$4.40 for tipped employees. It applies to businesses with gross receipts of more than \$319,000/yr.



Ohio Pension System Investment Performance

An investment expert retained by Ohio's Retirement Study Council to evaluate performance by Ohio's public pension funds said the state retirement systems did a respectable job of capturing the higher earnings in today's market. While noting the general downward trend among U.S. institutional investors in their long-term investment expectations, first-half returns for 2021 ranged from about 8.8% to about 11.5%. This occurred in Ohio's pension plans amid an economic expansion driven by economic stimulus, monetary policy and reopening of the economy after the COVID shutdowns.

Ohio Supreme Court Speaks on Sewage Backup Issues in Insurance Policies

In October the Ohio Supreme Court, in a 5-2 decision, sided with an insurance company in a dispute over a policy exclusion involving a sewage back up. The owner's policy included an exclusion for "loss or damage caused directly or indirectly by water that backs up or overflows from a sewer, drain or sump." The 9th District Court of Appeals had earlier ruled that since the exclusion language in the policy did not specifically include sewage, that the backup was not excluded. The case arose from a 2014 sewage back up from a municipal system—just look how long it takes for a court case to move through the legal system to the Supreme Court. In a dissenting opinion two Justices would have allowed insurance coverage maintaining that the policy exclusion language is subject to "more than one reasonable interpretation."



\$3.7 Million in H2Ohio Water & Wastewater Infrastructure Grants Announced

Gov. Mike DeWine and Ohio EPA Director Laurie A. Stevenson announced the following H2Ohio grants to localities to help improve drinking water quality and to repair or replace aging water and wastewater infrastructure.

Drinking Water Infrastructure Grants include:

- Manchester (Adams County), \$500,000—to support the near-total replacement of the village's water distribution system to reduce the health threats from waterline breaks and provide a more reliable water source to the village's 2,120 residents.
- Lawrence County, \$250,000—for planning and engineering design for a project that will provide safe drinking water to 50 residents in the Macedonia Hill area.
- Noble County Water Authority, \$135,000—for the extension of 97,000 feet of water lines to connect an estimated 130 residences and businesses to the existing water main.



Wastewater Infrastructure Grants include:

- Washington County, \$750,000—to connect 500 homes and businesses to the county sewer system in Devola. The community is now unsewered and septic tank failures are causing threats to public health.
- Findlay (Hancock County), \$600,000—to extend the city sewer system to serve 100 homes in Eagle Creek Subdivision so an old failing sewage treatment plant can be eliminated.
- Bainbridge (Ross County), \$500,000—to develop a new sanitary sewer system and treatment plan to serve the unsewered village with around 500 homes. This allows the elimination of inadequate septic tanks.
- Harrison County, \$500,000—to fund a new sewer system in village of Freeport which is now unsewered. The project will include a 75,000-gallon aeration treatment plant to serve 229 residences and businesses.
- Wayne Lakes (Darke County), \$500,000—with the village experiencing failing septic tanks the funding will be used to support the installation of a new sanitary sewer collection system to serve 338 residences and other structures.

Wetland Projects Continue to Move Forward

The Ohio Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and the Grand Lake Saint Mary's Lake Facilities Authority broke ground on the Burntwood-Langenkamp wetland in Mercer County in September. Funded under the H2Ohio program, this new wetland is the fourth "treatment train" associated with nutrient reduction efforts at Grand Lake St. Mary's. The 89-acre project includes three wetlands, several acres of planted trees, and a large buffer area of planted grasses to slow the flow of water and trap, filter and remove excess pollutants before they enter the lake. Ohio's first wetland completed under the new H2Ohio program in Central Ohio has also been completed. This one also impacts another original canal feeder lake, Buckeye Lake, in an effort to reduce harmful algal blooms (HAB's).

Water Infrastructure Repair Costs Tap Out Oregon's Small Cities

Like many small Ohio communities, the 2,000 residents of the farming community of Amity, Oregon, in the middle of wine country, is dealing with an outdated water infrastructure issue that often goes unseen. Some city water pipes are so old, they are made of wood.

To help cover the cost of projects and pay back the loans, the city will increase its sewer rates from \$48 to \$63 in January 2022. However, that new base rate will include 2,000 gallons of water, which the city hopes will help low-income residents. Amity's situation is not unique. A survey of 100 of Oregon's 241 cities indicate there is \$9.7 Billion in infrastructure needs. Extrapolated to all Oregon cities Portland State University estimates the need for \$23 billion in the next 20 years. The survey also highlighted how the anticipated per capita cost was significantly higher for smaller cities than for larger cities. The estimated per capita cost of paying for infrastructure over the next 10 years for Oregon cities with a population of fewer than 10,000 people was \$1,986. For populations of more than 10,000 people, the estimated cost is \$1,438.

Lake Erie's Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB): Twice as Bad as Predicted

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) final seasonal assessment of Lake Erie's toxic algae situation reported that the HAB formed was twice as severe as what was predicted by the agency. The 2021 bloom had a severity index of 6.0, which is considered "moderately severe". In June, NOAA scientists predicted a HAB with a severity index of 3.0 out of 10 on the severity index.

Criticisms of the H2Ohio Program Surface

Jeff Reutter, retired director of the Ohio Sea Grant and Ohio State University Stone Laboratory, maintains that H2Ohio's voluntary incentives and rules aren't enough. Reutter believes H2Ohio's efforts to expand and create wetlands, which help remove phosphorus from water are good, but that incentives have "absolutely no permanence."

He has seen no data supporting the belief that cover crops, no-till farming, windbreaks, buffer strips, drainage control structures, and similar incentives will ever be embraced widely enough to make an appreciable dent in the levels of algae-forming phosphorus and nitrogen that escape Northwest Ohio farms and pollute the Maumee River and Lake Erie's other tributaries.

Reutter thinks the Governor “is really trying to do the right thing” but maintains that “we’re not going to solve this with wetlands, but it’s a real good thing to do because it’s permanent.” As for the millions of additional dollars being offered to farmers so they can afford to embrace often-costly “best management practices”, he said his patience has run out. Mr. Reutter said he has waited for voluntary incentives to make a meaningful difference, but is now convinced they’re the wrong strategy. “I wish I could say I agree, but I can’t,” Mr. Reutter said about Ohio’s heavy reliance on incentives. “I would say there’s not even a glimmer of hope.”

Advocates Use Billboards in Campaign Against CAFO’s

Digital ads were popping up on electronic billboards in Toledo, Columbus, and Cleveland during the summer and are part of a campaign taking aim at Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO’s).

Lake Erie Advocates says the ads showing an iconic photo of a glass of green Lake Erie water and cows and hogs on so-called “factory farms” are meant to provoke discussion. “Nothing happens until we start talking about it, and that’s why we’ve kicked off this campaign to start the conversation about banning factory farms,” said Mike Fenner, a representative of Lake Erie Advocates.

According to the group, waste produced by CAFOs is commonly spread on farm fields, which allows phosphorous to leach into the watershed and feed annual algal blooms in Lake Erie. The advocacy group completed research last year and found that 25 million animals in more than 800 CAFOs in western Lake Erie excrete as much phosphorous as the human populations of Ohio, Indiana, Chicago, and Atlanta.

The group has concluded that the regulations governing factory farms are empty, and “politicians’ feel-good solutions are part of the problem.” Their impractical solution? “The only way to deal with this industry is to ban it.”

CAT Tax—On its Way Out?

In late October, the House Ways and Means Committee heard testimony on a bill that would repeal the Commercial Activity Tax (CAT), saying the tax harms businesses. Reps. Jennifer Gross (R-West Chester) and Riordan McClain (R-Upper Sandusky) -- the son of Ohio Tax Commissioner Jeff McClain -- spoke on their HB234, with Gross noting that Ohio is one of only nine states with a statewide gross receipts tax. The proposal calls for a phase down of the tax by 20% per year until it is repealed. It is interesting to note that a number of years ago this tax was used to replace lost revenue from the old tangible personal property tax which had been the target of business and industry for decades. No replacement for lost revenue is included in the legislation.

