

Situation Summary Sewer Overflow Remediation Plan

- Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) occur when untreated sewage is discharged into waterways such as streams, creeks, rivers and lakes.
- Discharging untreated waste into waterways was once an accepted engineering practice. When Cleveland Heights' sewer system was built 100 years ago, it was designed to prevent backups into homes by overflowing into storm drains during heavy rains. These drains discharge into local Lake Erie streams including Doan and Dugway Brooks, and Nine Mile Creek.
- SSOs have been identified as a health risk and pollution problem in communities across the country. Because of increased focus on protecting the Great Lakes freshwater resource from harmful algal blooms and other issues, the Lake Erie watershed has come under particular scrutiny relating to sewer discharges and other sources of pollution.
- The City of Cleveland Heights is committed to protecting our ecosystem's freshwater supply by controlling SSOs in our community.
- Most recently in 2015, after years of preliminary discussion and investigation, the USEPA initiated negotiations with the City about its ongoing efforts to eliminate SSOs. At that time, they insisted the City take immediate action to resolve the issue. Estimates to remediate the full sewer system were staggering.
- City officials entered confidential negotiations with the EPA seeking to reduce the obligation and its impact on the city sewer system's ratepayers. City officials were restricted from discussing the order or the negotiations by confidentiality restrictions.
- On May 1, City Staff and the USEPA reached a tentative agreement to implement a two-phased consent decree. This tentative agreement requires approval by City Council. Phase one will conduct a comprehensive study of the system and develop an overflow control plan by June 2021. The goal of the study is to determine the best course of action to control SSOs while minimizing the impact on ratepayers through smart investments. Details of phase two will be negotiated when phase one is complete and will implement the plan developed in phase one.
- Phase one will require an investment of \$12million between 2017 and 2021. This will have a significant impact on sewer rates—increasing rates approximately \$18.73 per month for the average customer—but the City believes the investment will significantly reduce the ultimate cost of controlling SSOs and improve the efficiency of system improvements required to comply with EPA mandates.
- The agreement commits the City to remediate overflows. Council remains cognizant that there are some in our community who cannot afford the extra fees. Therefore, the city will develop a payment assistance program to be introduced prior to the rate increase, which will begin in October, with first quarterly invoices to be sent in January 2018.

