

## FRANCHISE DEAL WILL COST TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS NOTHING

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Under a franchise arrangement, Prairie Township won't go broke in pursuing water and sewer for its future residents. In fact, township trustee Jeff Nourse said, it would cost residents nothing.

Nourse explained to residents at the Oct. 15 township meeting why getting sewer and water is so important in fighting Columbus annexation. Land in the township is slowly being swallowed by Columbus as the city continues to barter its water and sewer in exchange for township land.

"By franchising, the unserved areas end up with water and sewer and no one has to annex to get it," Nourse said. "We're not going to pay a penny more. Those who will be affected will be new development."

Nourse said he believes that the franchise option to getting sewer and water is the least intrusive way and the option that will cause the least amount of grief.

With a franchise, the township has the right to provide sewer and water. It would be an investor-owned utility regulated by the Public Utilities Commission of Ohio.

Ohio American Water, already a presence in the township, has been the utility trustees have been pursuing. Currently it serves residents who live in Lake Darby Estates.

Jeff Henson of Ohio American Water said the utility has been working with the trustees on a franchise agreement for some time now.

"We still have a long ways to go...right now we don't have all of the answers," Henson said about several political issues facing the process. "We're working together to decide what the townships interests are."

For now, Henson said Ohio American Water plans to go through the process to be a provider for the township. Once that is established, then the utility will develop a master plan for putting in services.

"Our role is to provide services," Henson said. "Political issues, that's not our role."

In terms of what effect there will be on current sewer and water for those residents in the township, Nourse assured that there is none.

Nourse said with the franchise agreement in place, the only people who will be affected will be those moving into new constructions and existing Ohio American Service Areas. The franchise will cost the township government nothing, he said.

Henson said Ohio American Water pays property tax and earns a rate of return which would be determined by PUCO.

"We have one of the most stringent limitations because we discharge into

Darby," Henson said. "We believe we are efficient in the way we operate."

The quest for water and sewer has become a political battle between the township and the city of Columbus. Nourse criticized the city's 20 year policy of no sewer and water without annexation. Nourse said with annexation comes developer driven "dumb" growth, higher density, flooding, traffic and sanitary sewer problems.

"Last year, Columbus propagated an ESDA (Environmentally Sensitive Development Area), an area where they prohibit development," Nourse said. "With this change in policy, they are preparing to annex everything they can."

Hilliard Rome Road is a good example of Columbus development the township wants to avoid, he said.

"There's a hodgepodge of commercial and you can't even drive down the road," Nourse said. "Planned development is a better answer. In order for us to develop the way we want to, we need to get water and sewer."

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