

Ohio American Water franchise agreement

Referendum process continues

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ThisWeek Staff Writer

The required signatures have been collected for a referendum to undo a franchise agreement between Prairie Township and Ohio American Water for water and sewer services.

Resident Steve Kennedy is leading another referendum initiative. Earlier this year, Kennedy went through the same process to get the Property Maintenance Code on the November ballot.

Kennedy said the franchise agreement with Ohio American Water is something the voters should also have a say in. So far, Kennedy said he has collected 633 signatures -- significantly more than the 363 needed to put the issue to a vote.

Those signatures were filed last Thursday and will be held by the township clerk for 10 days before being sent to the Franklin County Board of Elections to be verified.

The franchise agreement was approved April 13 by trustees by a 2-1 vote with trustee Doug Stormont voting against it. Trustees Joe Wharton and Teresa Keller have said that the franchise agreement sets the foundation for future development of the township when it comes to water and waste water services to certain unincorporated areas.

Kennedy said to go into such a contract without first letting the residents know about it was just one deciding factor when it came to putting the agreement up for referendum.

"The way they did it, with no discussion, is not the democratic process," Kennedy said.

Ohio American Water currently serves residents in the township within the Darby Estates subdivision.

Residents who live in the area have complained to trustees about hard water and the high cost. Kennedy said he hasn't talked to one Darby Estates resident who has been happy with the water company.

"Why are we entering into a franchise agreement with that kind of track record?" Kennedy asked.

Also in relation to the franchise agreement, trustees voted at the April 13 board meeting in favor of accepting an engineering plan completed by GGC Engineers for its evaluation of 96 acres of land adjacent to O'Harra Road and owned by Dr. Paul Gutheil. The land in question is bisected by Hellbranch Run and could be a possible site of a wastewater treatment plant.

Trustees recently voted to have the tract of land appraised for purchase.

Kennedy said going into a contract with Ohio American Water is premature since the township hasn't purchased the land. To build such a facility in that location so close to the Hellbranch also compromises the work being done on the Big Darby Accord, he said.

"I've got a lot of questions," he said.

Kennedy said he enlisted the aid of seven other township residents to collect the signatures for the referendum. Those residents began collecting names on April 22 and finished on May 4.

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