

## City to 'start from scratch' in fight against flooding

Written by Kevin Kelley on August 27, 2014

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Westshore

The administration of Mayor Eileen Patton plans to hire an engineering consultant to re-evaluate how to stop the problem of basement flooding during heavy rainstorms.

Service Director Rob Berner announced the plan to hire the company during a public meeting on the flooding issue Aug. 20 in the basement meeting room of City Hall. The meeting was originally organized by Ward 4 Councilman John Hinkel for residents of his ward, but later expanded to cover the flooding issue across the entire city.

The city plans to hire Black & Veatch, a global consulting, engineering and construction firm that specializes in what it calls "critical human infrastructure," such as energy, water and telecommunications systems. The Kansas-based company has more than 100 offices around the world. The firm's Akron office will be handling the Fairview Park project.

"We're going to start from scratch with our plan to improve our sewer system," Berner said in announcing the decision to hire Black & Veatch.

"We need to look at what we need to do to our (stormwater) collection system to bring it into the 21st century," the service director added.

Berner said Black & Veatch will initially evaluate the city's data on its stormwater system at an estimated cost of \$5,000. Berner told attendees of the Aug. 20 meeting that the consultant will then need 15 to 20 months to develop an overall plan to eliminate flooding. A final plan will likely be implemented in four to five phases over a period of four to 15 years, Berner estimated.

After that comment, some older residents, frustrated by repeated basement floods, could be heard saying they'll be dead in 15 years.

In May, Mayor Eileen Patton said the city's efforts to stem basement flooding, while an ongoing battle, have met with some success.

Berner said city officials were still evaluating what caused homes in the northwest area of the city the experience flooding Aug. 12. That day's storm and consequent flooding prompted Hinkel, and later other council members, to organize the Aug. 20 meeting.

"We simply decided it was time to have a fresh set of eyes look at what we are doing in light of all the time, money and efforts spent in the last

10 years and we still get persistent basement flooding," Berner told

West Life on the decision to hire Black & Veatch.

The basic problem continues to be large amounts of stormwater entering the sanitary sewer system during heavy rains, said Berner and Michael Mackay, whose company provides engineering services for the city. The sanitary sewers then become overwhelmed with rainwater that should not be in those pipes. When that happens, water takes the path of least resistance, namely any area higher than the pipes, which in many cases is homeowners' basements.

In many cases the stormwater infiltration is caused by residential downspouts that are connected to the sanitary sewer system rather than the stormwater sewer system. Long discontinued, this construction practice was not uncommon; the thinking was that the sanitary sewers would benefit from being flushed out by the rain.

The city has been providing a dye testing program through which residents could tell if their downspouts were incorrectly connected.

However, at the Aug. 20 meeting, Berner recommended, as a temporary measure, that homeowners in areas experiencing flooding disconnect their downspouts and allow rainwater to splash out onto their grass. Berner showed an L-shaped spout and splash block – items that can be purchased for roughly \$20 at hardware stores – that are used to disconnect each downspout. The splash block prevents water from getting into the house's foundation.

“For now, I am recommending all homes in areas affected by flooding to disconnect their downspouts and splash them,” Berner told West Life. “Until we can fully examine and determine a course of action to mitigate the flooding problem I am recommending this course of action. I am recommending this because there is a definite inflow problem, and downspouts can be a definite inflow source.”

Berner also told residents a yet unknown monetary investment would be required to improve the city's sewer system, parts of which are more than six decades old.

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