

# Dye testing program planned to find cause of basement flooding

Written by [Kevin Kelley](#) on May 28, 2014

**By Kevin Kelley**

*Fairview Park*

The administration of Mayor Eileen Patton announced a new diagnostic program it hopes will lead to a reduction in the number of flooded basements that follow heavy storms.

Patton, service Director Rob Berner and Michael Mackay, whose company provides engineering services for the city, announced the program at the May 19 City Council meeting.

The announcement came one week after a heavy storm dumped rain on several Westshore communities.

City officials said they identified 53 homes that flooded May 12 but conceded the total number was likely twice as high. Most were located in or near Ward 5, whose boundaries once corresponded with the former suburb of Parkview Village, which was annexed by the city in 1967. Sanitary sewage from the former Parkview Village is sent to the North Olmsted Wastewater Treatment Plant, while the rest of the city's sewage is sent to the Rocky River Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The program, which Patton said will cost more than \$15,000, involves dye testing to check if a home's downspouts are improperly connected to the city's sanitary sewer system. Testing will begin with the 53 homes in which basements flooded, Mackay said. The goal, he said, is to determine why a basement flooded and identify remedies.

"The fixes could be downspout disconnecting, lateral repairs, sump pumps or similar repairs," Mackay said.

Legislation to fund the dye testing program will be introduced to City Council in the coming weeks, Patton said.

Berner said the May 12 flooding occurred because the city's sanitary sewers became "charged," or overwhelmed with rainwater from the storm. In such cases, Berner said, water takes the path of least resistance, namely any area higher than the pipes, which in many cases was homeowners' basements.

In decades past, Berner said, the practice was to connect storm downspouts to the sanitary sewer system. The thinking was that the sanitary sewers would benefit from being flushed out by the rain. Instead, heavy storms cause the sanitary sewers to become overloaded by rainwater, thus causing basements to flood.

Under questioning from a resident, Berner acknowledged that in 2011-2012 the city identified several dozen homes that failed smoke testing, a diagnostic tool similar to dye testing, but no further action was taken.

“We need to address the people who have not taken measures to clean their pipes and keep their pipes free of stormwater,” Berner said.

While the city will conduct the dye testing at no cost, the homeowner will be responsible for implementing any upgrades deemed necessary, Berner said.

A handful of residents whose basements flooded expressed their frustration during the council meeting. One complained he felt like he lived in “Floodview,” not Fairview.

Some seemed to struggle with the notion that an easy solution to the problem does not exist.

Residents’ suggestions included installing larger pipes and building a large retention basin at Nelson Russ Park. Mackay said it is not feasible to make the pipes big enough to handle the water produced by such storms. Instead, he said, the goal must be to keep stormwater out of the sanitary sewers.

While Mackay said the city will investigate adding stormwater retention basins at Coe Creek, he doubted that was the solution.

Patton noted the city has spent \$11 million on its sewers since she became mayor in 2000, and more than \$1 million since 2011. The mayor said the city has had success in recent years in reducing the problem of flooded basements, which she said remained a priority for her administration.

“We are having success in some of the areas,” Patton told residents at the meeting. “I know you don’t want to hear that because your houses flooded,”

Patton said her administration will continue to fight the problem “street by street, neighborhood by neighborhood.”

“We’re not going to stop until we have this resolved,” she said.