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Macomb Officials Call For Oakland County To Change Wastewater System

Oakland County is facing backlash on the county's wastewater system with some calling for the stripping of the county's ability to make permit requests, including the renewal of its current treatment plan, to state regulators as a punishment.

Officials in Oakland said the changes Macomb officials are seeking aren't economically feasible.

Macomb County Public Works Commissioner Candice Miller there is no current plan in the works to fix the issues at Oakland County's George W. Kuhn Combined Sewer Overflow Retention Treatment Facility. .

Oakland County's current discharge permit for its wastewater facility is under review by the Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy. . However, state law allows a county to continue operating wastewater treatment systems after the county's discharge permit is expired while a renewal application is pending.

Miller said this discharge permit allows for Oakland County to release partially treated sewage into the Red Run Drain, which then flows into the Clinton River and Lake St. Clair.

Miller said she is not only worried about the quality of the discharges from Oakland County, but the quantity as well, leading to flooding in Macomb County rather than in Oakland's own neighborhoods.

Miller said Oakland County and its Water Resources Commissioner Jim Nash's stance remains the same: the state permits the county to dump their sewage into Lake St. Clair, so they don't have to do anything about it. "We're drowning down here," Miller said. "We're trying to raise the alarm here that this can't continue, something has to happen."

Miller said she will file a lawsuit if it means making Oakland County "realize what they are doing to their neighbors."

Miller said she would be open to their respective counties partnering to fix the issue, saying she told Nash she would head to D.C. with him to get money to build bigger water retention basins.

Nash was not available for comment at the time of publication.

The Oakland County Water Resources Commissioner's Office said in a statement separating the water treatment systems in the combined treatment plan would be "neither economically feasible, nor scientifically justifiable."

The statement also said it is not uncommon for a treatment system to operate under an expired permit while waiting to be renewed, and Oakland County has never been late on submitting materials necessary to what is required for permit renewal.

Miller said EGLE needs to do more to regulate the county. Hugh McDiarmid Jr., communications manager for EGLE, said in a statement the treatment facility meets all federal and state regulations regarding the discharge, which authorizes treated combined sewer overflow, not untreated discharges.

The statement said EGLE will determine if any additional steps need to be taken before reissuing the permit to the county.

"EGLE will hold permittees accountable and ensure that appropriate corrective action is taken, and has been supporting, both technically and financially, communities that go beyond the legal minimums to strategically manage flow, increase system capacity, improve storm water permeability, and encourage water conservation," McDiarmid said in a statement.

[Rep. Doug Wozniak](#) (R-Shelby Township) is calling for the department to withhold the approval of pending discharge permit renewal, saying in a statement the state "has turned a blind eye" on the issue for too long.

"We cannot continue letting Oakland County dump millions of gallons of sewage into Macomb County surface waters," Wozniak said in a statement. "Our next-door neighbor – one of the wealthiest counties in the country, has been glossing over this problem for decades, and the state has permitted it! Nothing is stopping Oakland County from committing resources to the wastewater system. If more of its residents

knew what they were doing to Michigan’s waters, they would demand that the county take corrective action.”

Wozniak is also working on legislation to prohibit EGLE from approving the renewal of Oakland County’s permit specifically but called for the department to act without having to wait for his legislation to pass.

Miller thinks the legislation is a “great start,” but said it was unfortunate that her county must take this route, knowing it will be an “expensive fix” and will not lend an overnight solution.

Miller said with climate change adding pressure to their systems, adding to the amount of rainfall in the area, a solution needs to happen now. “I really do want to address this in a regional format, if possible, but in the interim, I’m trying to bring some pressure to bear, or at least to educate people of what is happening and how wrong this is,” Miller said.

– By Liz Nass

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