

For immediate release

January 29, 2009

Mayor, City Council Welcome Historic Ohio EPA Final Approval of \$2.5 Billion Plan to Reduce Sewage Overflows

(Columbus) Mayor Michael B. Coleman and City Council are pleased the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has given final approval to the City's \$2.5 billion, Wet Weather Management Plan (WWMP). The plan, once completed, will dramatically reduce sewer overflows and basement backups during heavy rains and result in cleaner local waterways. The WWMP, submitted to Ohio EPA July 1, 2005, will bring the City into compliance with two consent orders signed with the State of Ohio in 2002 and 2004.

“Columbus is again making history and leading the nation thanks to our hard work with Ohio EPA to finalize our innovative plan to reduce sewer overflows, improve our waterways and make basements drier for Columbus families,” said Mayor Coleman. “This is a giant step forward toward a healthier, greener Columbus. It is also an expensive project, so we must stay vigilant to do all we can to keep water and sewer rates affordable.”

To date, the City has invested nearly \$1 billion in consent order projects, including a \$106 million new Headworks facility at the Southerly Wastewater Treatment Plant, other upgrades at the plant, the Big Walnut Augmentation/Rickenbacker Interceptor and neighborhood sewer projects that will help reduce overflows and basement backups. Additional improvements to the Southerly and Jackson Pike wastewater treatment plants totaling \$329 million are to be completed by 2010 as required. These projects are part of the WWMP Interim Plan, which Ohio EPA approved in March 2008.

“These improvements will help the City of Columbus meet the increased demands being placed on our wastewater infrastructure in an environmentally friendly way,” said City Council Public Utilities Committee Chair Eileen Paley.

Ohio EPA approval of the WWMP covers projects in the plan except for the timetable for the final two phases of two large diameter underground tunnels that will run along the Olentangy River and Alum Creek. Ohio EPA's approval requires the City to submit an accelerated schedule for completion of the two large tunnels, as well as an affordability analysis and rate study by January 9, 2015, which will build on an extensive affordability analysis the City originally submitted with the WWMP in 2005. The deadline is a change from the July 1, 2016, date Ohio EPA set in its draft approval.

“This historic agreement is the result of the City's best and brightest working closely with our partners at Ohio EPA,” said Department of Public Utilities Director Tatyana Arsh. “We remain committed to that relationship, making sure the plan is done in a fiscally and environmentally responsible way that better serves our ratepayers while doing all we can to keep rates affordable.”

Since 2006, the City's Low Income Discount Program has provided a discount to ratepayers living in poverty who meet the program's qualifications. With City Council

approval, the discount was increased from 15 to 20 percent, effective January 1, 2009. A separate discount, generally in the range of 10 percent, is also available to eligible senior citizens 60 years of age and older. Both discounts' requirements are based on federal poverty guidelines.

The WWMP will reduce annual sewer overflows from the current 1.65 billion gallons to 250 million gallons by 2025, and to about 100 million gallons by the WWMP's completion, thereby meeting water quality standards.

Ohio EPA gave draft approval to the WWMP July 18, 2008. Ohio EPA subsequently held an information session and public hearing September 23, 2008, then considered public comment at the meeting and the plan's technical, social, economic and environmental components before issuing the final approval.

Read the Ohio EPA Press Release (next page)



State of Ohio Environmental Protection Agency

PUBLIC INTEREST CENTER

P.O. Box 1049, 50 W. Town St., Suite 700

Columbus, OH 43216-1049

Tele: (614) 644-2160 Fax: (614) 644-2737

NEWS RELEASE

FOR RELEASE: January 29, 2009

CONTACT: Erin Strouse, (614) 644-2160

Ohio EPA Issues Final Approval of Columbus' Wet Weather Management Plan to Reduce Sewage Overflows

Ohio EPA has approved the city of Columbus' wet weather management plan and proposed modifications to two of the city's wastewater discharge permits. When the plan is implemented, there will be a dramatic decrease in sewer overflows and basement backups that occur in the city of Columbus service area after rains and snowmelt. The total cost for the projects in the wet weather management plan is \$2.5 billion (2005 dollars).

Columbus submitted its wet weather management plan to Ohio EPA in 2005 in accordance with two separate consent orders issued by the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas in 2002 and 2004. The orders require Columbus to develop and implement a comprehensive plan to control overflows from the sewer system.

This action means the Agency approves the projects in the wet weather management plan. The schedule for implementing these projects also is approved with the exception of the schedule for completing the final two phases of the Olentangy and Alum Creek relief tunnels. The approval requires Columbus to submit an affordability analysis and rate study no later than January 9, 2015, with an accelerated schedule to complete the construction of those tunnels. This is a change from the July 1, 2016, date that was in the draft approval.

Ohio EPA held an information session and public hearing on September 23, 2008, regarding the Agency's draft approval of the city's wet weather management plan. Ohio EPA considered the public's comments, as well as technical, social, economic and environmental aspects of the plan prior to issuing its final approval.

As a condition of approval of the wet weather management plan, Ohio EPA will require Columbus to periodically re-evaluate whether the remaining overflows can be further minimized or eliminated and Ohio EPA reserves the right to require additional controls. Ohio EPA also is proposing to modify the wastewater discharge permits for Columbus' Jackson Pike and Southerly wastewater treatment plants. The modifications to the discharge permits require Columbus to implement the approved wet weather management plan. The plan would be consistent with the conditions outlined in the Ohio EPA final plan approval.

-more-

The Columbus sewer system currently discharges approximately 1.65 billion gallons of sewer overflow in a typical year. By 2025, these overflows will be reduced to an annual total of approximately 250 million gallons. Once all projects are completed, it is estimated that remaining overflows from the system will be reduced to approximately 100 million gallons per year on average. This remaining overflow volume will not violate water quality standards that protect human health and aquatic life. This is primarily due to the relatively short duration of the discharge (approximately 15 hours total in an average year) and because the discharge will be to the Scioto River during high river flows, allowing significant dilution of the remaining overflow volume.

In the 2004 consent order, Columbus also was required to propose interim projects that could significantly reduce the volume of overflow by 2010. Ohio EPA approved the interim plan in March 2008. The interim plan proposed several major projects to meet this requirement. Construction of these projects is currently underway and is expected to reduce sewage discharges by approximately 540 million gallons in a typical year by 2010. The total cost for these interim projects is \$729 million.

Issuance of the final wet weather management plan can be appealed to the Environmental Review Appeals Commission (ERAC). Many appeals must be filed within 30 days of issuing the final action; therefore, Ohio EPA recommends that anyone wishing to file an appeal contact ERAC at (614) 466-8950 for more information.

Copies of the approval letter and proposed modifications to the city's wastewater discharge permits are available at http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/cso/columbus_ltcp.html or may be reviewed at Ohio EPA's Central District Office, Lazarus Government Center, Division of Surface Water, 50 W. Town St., Suite 700, Columbus, by first calling (614) 728-3778 to make an appointment.

Background on Sewer Overflow Problems

The Columbus wet weather management plan addresses overflows from the separately sewered areas of the city as well as overflows from the combined sewer system. Many cities in Ohio and across the nation are being required to address combined and sanitary sewer overflows. Sewage overflows are a major water pollution concern and can have adverse effects on human health.

For additional information regarding sewer overflows, how they impact the environment, why they are a concern, where they are located in Ohio and what is being done to address their impact, log on to: <http://www.epa.state.oh.us/dsw/cso/csoindex.html>.