

## Bedrock snarls sewer-line construction

Delaware County seeking permission to dig through, not under, the Olentangy

By Jane Hawes  
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DELAWARE, Ohio — A 4-mile-long sewer project hit an obstacle in the form of Olentangy River bedrock, so the county is seeking permission to backhoe through it rather than tunnel under it.

Environmentalists and residents are concerned.

"You can't stop development, but there are concerns about storm water runoff and construction practices," said Kathy Remias, a program coordinator for the Friends of the Lower Olentangy Watershed. The non-profit group advocates protecting the 150-square-mile Olentangy River watershed in Delaware and Franklin counties.

The county began work earlier this year on the Perry-Taggart sewer line, a \$16.2 million project that will zig and zag along and across the Olentangy by the

time it's completed, probably next summer. It would provide service to the area near Rt. 23 and Rt. 315 and between Orange and Hyatts roads.

Because the river is a state-designated scenic river and the line is slated to cross it six times, construction plans had to be approved by Ohio's Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Natural Resources.

The original plans were approved, but the county is seeking permission to change them because they've found that they don't have the equipment to tunnel through bedrock under the riverbed.

Both agencies must review the new plans.

Bob Gable, ODNR's scenic river program manager, said open-cut trenching uses a backhoe and surface digging to install a line, instead of microtunneling or boring under the riverbed. It's a more invasive process, but not unheard of — even along protected rivers like the Olentangy.

"We prefer the boring," Gable said, "and we're more inclined to approve the boring, but we'll

look at an open-cut proposal, just with a much greater degree of scrutiny."

Gable said the time needed to review such an application can vary from a few weeks to a few months.

Barry Bryant, the county's director of environmental services, said the project will stay on schedule for completion next summer.

If approved, the county would have to use special restoration techniques, said Mike Sapp, an EPA environmental specialist, as well as perform what are called mitigation projects in compensation for the disruption.

The impact of open-cut trenching on the river and surrounding land actually "can be pretty short-term," Sapp said, adding that he's more concerned about what happens after the line is built.

"What really concerns me," Sapp said, "is that it's going to open up both sides of this river and an exceptional warm-water habitat environment to development."

The Olentangy is teeming with plant and animal life, the likes of which can disappear

when environmentally insensitive development occurs, Remias said.

"The problems include increased flooding, sewage overflows, declining water quality, diminishing groundwater recharge, construction sediments as they impact aquatic habitat, and erosion of stream channels causing them to be unstable," Remias said.

Residents also are concerned. Matt Montague heads Friends of Delaware County, which was formed last year to protest the Sawmill Parkway extension project in southern Delaware County. The group is beginning to weigh in on other development issues.

"We want to see low-density development, and we're concerned about preserving the natural beauty of the county," Montague said. "We're not environmental experts, but it seems like something like this might possibly cause problems downstream."

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