

Unfunded mandates drive up sewer rates

Gary Moore, Boone County Judge/Executive

An unfunded mandate from the EPA is requiring SD1 to make millions and millions of dollars worth of upgrades to our sewer system. This work is not negotiable. It cannot be put off. And if it isn't done, SD1 could add fines to its list of expenses. The most fiscally responsible course for SD1 to take now is to direct all the funds possible into these upgrades. It's a decision between raising rates now an average of \$5 a month or passing \$200 million in additional expenses on to our children. And unfortunately our community isn't the only one in this situation. In fact hundreds of other communities are facing similar Consent Decrees. And after these increases, our rates will be below the median in comparable communities.

During my 12 years of service to Boone County, I have never imposed a new tax. In fact, the property tax rates are 9% lower than when I first took office. So clearly my vote to ratify the board's 7-0 decision to raise sewer fees was a difficult one. I had to vote in favor of the rate increases to comply with the Federal Court Order to clean up our water.

But putting money into this aging system isn't just about avoiding legal repercussions. It's also about investing in our community's economy and environment. Without improvements in our sewer system, our ability to grow is limited. Parts of Boone County could have been placed under a development moratorium if it weren't for the western

sewer plant now under construction. You can't create jobs without building sewers. Period.

Perhaps more important than anything, these funds will keep our raw sewage from spewing into the creeks and streams behind our homes. Portions of Northern Kentucky's sewer system are 100 years old and built for a much smaller population. When SD1 took responsibility for the majority of these sewer systems in the 1990s, it was handed an infrastructure that poured tens of billions of gallons of diluted sewage straight into the natural environment. It's an expensive process to update this system but it's hard to argue against keeping our excrement out of the environment.

This discussion is more complex than mere finger pointing and more complicated than simple talking points. SD1 has to balance legal requirements with financial issues and common sense. By complying with the Consent Decree as mandated by the Federal Court Order, we can improve our environment while avoiding a moratorium on future growth. A vibrant economy and a clean environment are two of the factors resulting in Boone County being a leader in the Commonwealth and the nation. We are leading in population growth and job creation. We were just named the healthiest county in Kentucky for the second year in a row. We continue to be a great place to live, work, and raise a family. I am blessed to lead our community into a prosperous future.