

**Holyoke residents with private systems should be excluded from water runoff fees: Reader viewpoint**

It is NOT fair for residents who pay for private sewer services (septic systems) to be charged an added fee for storm water. As it is, they have been subsidizing the inadequate sewer fee through their property taxes for the last two years. Storm water from the area of the city without a sewer system does not even reach the treatment plant as storm water cannot travel up the Rt. 202 hill to enter the treatment plant.

Those with septic systems want to pay for services they actually receive from the city and that the city is able to provide. It has been stated that there is no sewer service available for approximately 700 homes in Holyoke. Those cities that have a storm water fee probably all have homes on the city sewer system. In that situation everyone is paying for a service they receive.

Those with septic systems have paid for the maintenance, testing and compliance with Title V regulations since they purchased their homes. There has been no assistance from the City and none is proposed in the Mayor's budget.

Those who receive sewer service have had one increase in the sewer fee since the upgrades were completed at the water treatment facility.

The budget proposed by the Mayor asks that those with private septic systems continue to subsidize the losses in the sewer fund and IN ADDITION pay a storm water runoff fee.

There is no water running off from those who pay for private septic services into the water treatment facility. Again, it is

impossible for water to flow up Route 202 to enter the water treatment plant.

To shift the cost of the sewer upgrade to those who have paid the full cost of private septic costs on their own is unfair. Establishing fees on all to help some is just a 'hidden' tax, and one that cannot be written off because it is proposed as a fee. There are certain limited government services that we all pay for that serve the entire community. The sewer service is NOT one of them!

What should be done?

On December 2, 2014, our highly regarded Acting City Auditor put forth a step by step approach to bring the sewer rates in line with the costs. He recommended a \$1 increase over time to avoid the shock of a steep increase (that did not pass the City Council as it was too much of an increase all at once).

The Mayor could have included this recommendation in the budget, but instead retained the subsidy and ADDED another fee. This is not a business friendly proposal. The addition of the storm water fee to those who do not receive sewer service is not a matter of taxpayers paying their fair share. It is a DOUBLE CHARGE to taxpayers who do not receive a service from the city.

It is time for local government to live within its means as taxpayers must. When free cash is certified it should be used to balance the sewer fund, not to further expand local government. Those taxpayers who pay for their own septic systems should not be required to pay any more and our business owners do not need another fee added to their cost of doing business.

*Linda Vacon, Holyoke City Councilor Ward 5*