

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

The Revitalization Committee thanks those who are reaching out to us individually in informal conversations; and those who submitted comments post-March 4th Community meeting regarding the proposed plan for Pierpont Township, the waste treatment situation downtown and proposed treatment plant and sewer footprint.

Citizen comments have been thoughtful, courteous, and contain excellent questions. Below are some of the frequently asked questions and brief answers. Please do not hesitate to contact a committee member if you would like more information.

1. How will the decision to go forward/not go forward with the sewer project be made?

The Ohio Revised Code (ORC) gives the county the ability to form a County Sewer District which then controls all systems within the district. The county commissioners make the final decisions after approval by the county sanitary engineer, OEPA and Ohio Department of Natural Resources (ODNR). Pierpont is currently NOT under OEPA orders, so we have some flexibility in the decision making. We are proposing to the county commissioners a multi-level process that can be stopped at several points if the burden of the project cost can not be reduced. Prior actions and a proposed time line look something like this:

2018 Fall Pierpont trustees vote unanimously to ask the County Commissioners to fund a preliminary engineering plan & cost estimate.

The County Commissioners agree to pay for preliminary engineering and ask county agency directors to seek grants and funding sources.

2019 Mar Preliminary engineering plan and costs; and potential grants are presented to the Pierpont Community at a public meeting. Pierpont is not under OEPA findings & orders and will need a different funding model and types of grants.

2019 Post-March 4. Analyses of formal public comments and informal one-on-one interactions show a pattern of widespread understanding about the need for a downtown sewer system and general support for the idea, BUT DEEP concern about the overall high cost of the project and individual property assessments which many residents are unable to afford.

The committee shares the community's concerns about cost uncertainties and capacities to pay for this system. We have had discussions with the new auditor about reducing or eliminating fees associated with sewer property assessments. We will be structuring resolutions for trustees consideration so as to maintain as much Pierpont Township control as possible in our partnership with the Ashtabula County Department of Environmental Services, the Department of Community Services and Planning, and the County Commissioners.

Current recommendations to our trustees include the following:

1) table construction decisions until full project costs and uncertainties can be reduced to citizen affordability; 2) request a copy of CT Consultant's contract for the general engineering plan and final report; 3) request the county continue to work with us in finding grants and writing proposals to reduce project costs; 4) explore in-house engineering capability; and 5) if we move to full engineering, solicit bids via request for qualifications (RFQ).

2. What ballot initiatives may appear in relation to the downtown sewer project?

No ballot initiatives are proposed. Some residents have recommended a township-wide levy to share the cost burden with downtown residents. Others are opposed.

3. How would a sewer project affect the Township budget? Will annual funding from real estate taxes be sufficient to make loan payments?

The Ohio Revised Code places the fiscal responsibility for sewer and water systems in a township on the County Commissioners and the County Sewer & Water District (see March 4th Nick Sanford, director of ACDES presentation on township website). All grants and loans to pay for a sewer system are initiated and managed by the County Commissioners via the Ashtabula County Department of Environmental Services. A downtown sewer system will not use any Township funds and will not affect township services. Pierpont Township is not fiscally responsible and will have no loans associated with a public sewer. There will be no cost effects on the township budget. All real estate tax dollars coming into the township will continue to be available for road and cemetery maintenance or other uses in compliance with the Ohio Revised Code.

NOTE. The addition of new businesses and residential housing downtown will increase the real estate value and tax dollars that the Township receives, making new dollars available for priority projects such as roads. Example. If Dollar General builds a store and does business in Pierpont, a portion of their tax dollars will return to Pierpont Township for use on township roads and cemeteries. More businesses and residential housing downtown will mean more tax dollars for the township.

4. Will current businesses contribute to the cost of the sewer system?

Yes. Businesses, like residents will pay property assessments, hookup/abandonment of septic systems, and monthly rates. The assessment rates are set by the County Commissioners based on costs and recommendations by ACDES. Monthly commercial rates are usually higher than residential rates.

5. Will new businesses contribute to the cost of the sewer system?

Yes. Property assessments follow the property, so new businesses purchasing downtown property will assume the assessment as part of the purchase. New businesses are expected to pay a substantial hook-up fee. They will also pay a monthly

bill. Additional homes and businesses paying a monthly bill, will reduce the monthly costs for all because they will share the operation and maintenance costs for the system.

6. If my single-residential house, garage and outbuildings are on two small parcels will I be assessed for one home or based on the number of tax parcels?

The assessment methodology is set by the county as recommended by ACDES. It can be per house or commercial building or it can be a combination of frontage and building uses on the property. We proposed to the county it be per house or commercial building rather than tax parcel based or frontage owned. The scenario the engineer presented on March 4th (see slide presentation at pierponttownship.com) was based on assessments of one tap-in per house or commercial business.

NOTE. We currently do not have local zoning in place to guide the decision on the minimum lot size for a residential house. See the March 4 presentation, Randy Barnes ppt: The health department requirement for new construction is 200' frontage and two acres to accommodate a new septic system. With a sewer system, residential building could be on much smaller lots, so some of our vacant parcels that currently can't be built on because of septic limitations would have potential resale value for new residential homes if landowners at some future date wanted to sell.

7. Sixty percent of the land downtown, houses and building lots are owned by people who do not live downtown. These are commercial properties including rentals whose owners derive income from them. How will renters be able to afford an increase in rent when the landlord passes on the cost of the sewer?

The costs and benefits of a sewer system will accrue to commercial and residential landowners. Rental property is a business investment and each landlord will have to make a decision about if or how much of the cost will be passed on to the renter in the form of increased rent. A sewer system reduces landlord maintenance costs for septic systems and adds long term value to the rental property. A public sewer would also permit larger (over three) multiple units.

We are **VERY concerned about the property assessment costs for BOTH commercial and owner occupied residential homes.** We will not support the construction of a sewer system without grants that reduce the assessment costs to the average replacement cost of a residential septic system. It is critical that the sewer system be affordable to ALL landowners.

8. I am very concerned about financial hardship for downtown residents. How can we reduce the burden on them?

This will require a multi-prong strategy: Grants will be needed to reduce overall construction costs and property assessments. The goal will be to reduce property assessment to the average cost of a new septic system. To cover hook up costs for low

and moderate income (LMI) households, there are community development block grants (CDBG) for LMI residents which can reduce or eliminate their costs. If we move forward on a sewer project we can apply for these grants in the next cycle (2021).

For some fixed income households, even the annual cost of paying a lowered property assessment may be a hardship. We are exploring the creation of a NFP benevolent fund that township residents and others could donate towards. This fund could be used to help fixed and low income households pay annual property assessments.

9. I would really like Dollar General to come to Pierpont. How is the committee encouraging them? Will they hook up to the public sewer?

We are not opposed to a Dollar General; the store will provide an excellent “anchor” to existing and future Pierpont businesses. Members of the committee have been in contact with them as they work through their real estate decisions. We encouraged Bob Gage, GBT Realty and the engineering firm representing Dollar General to attend the March 4th community meeting and were pleased that Bob attended the meeting. He was invited to speak if he wished during the public comment period. Dollar General has repeatedly stated their support and encouragement for a local sewer system and we think they will be a fine addition to the community.

10. Who will operate and manage the waste treatment plant once the system is built?

The Ashtabula County Department of Environmental Services (ACDES) will run the Pierpont system for the county sewer district. They are professionals, have a lot of expertise and currently manage other systems in the county.

11. If we go forward, what is the time line for a sewer system to be in service? How long will this system last?

The project needs a full engineering design which could take 6-8 months or longer. During this period design longevity, siting and other decisions will have to be made; followed by OEPA and ODNR review and permits, construction bids and actual construction. Concurrently grants and financing will need to be in place. This suggests it would be 3-4 years (2021 or 2022) at the earliest.

12. Isn't the assessment of downtown household septic systems and threats of failing systems just scare tactics?

Household septic systems are designed to last 30 years, not 100 years. If you have questions about your own septic system, you can contact Randy Barnes at the Health Department. Also look at his and Health Commissioner Ray Saporito's March 4 presentations on the township website: pierponttownship.com

The Ohio Department of Health as does Ashtabula County Health Department take public health and sanitation issues seriously. These are not scare tactics. These inspections are mandated by Ohio law. Essentially all systems in Ashtabula County including Pierpont will need to be inspected by 2032. THAT IS ONLY 13 YEARS AWAY.

13. Downtown also needs public water. What plans are you making for that?

We are very aware that public water is a need. The community survey showed 55% find lack of a public water system a problem, with 25% saying it is serious and 30% saying it is a moderate concern. Public water is an emerging need that will move from moderate concern to serious concern in the near future. The last section of the Revitalization Plan discusses this concern (to download the plan go to pieronttownship.com).

14. Web access in the township is terrible. Better broadband would bring businesses and help residents. What progress on this part of the plan?

Broadband is a high priority. We are working on a township-wide inventory, including the location of fiber along SR 7 through the township and other roads; current speeds and reliability issues. Watch the township website for updates.

15. How will the community give input to future revitalization activities?

Thank you for the widespread interest and support for the proposed revitalization plan. It is a work in progress and we will continuously look for ways to seek your input and keep you informed. It will take all of us to renew and re-energize our township and we need your innovative ideas, activities, and investments.

The township website pierponttownship.com will give updates on progress of broadband and sewer projects as well as zoning updates and community related activities.

If you have ideas, concerns, observations and information you'd like us to know, or just want to brainstorm with us you can send us a note at the Township Hall (1109 SR 7 N) or contact one of the Revitalization Committee members directly. We are a small community, one-to-one conversations are welcomed. We want to know what you are thinking. You may also want to attend the twice monthly regular township meetings for information.

Revitalization Committee: Lois Wright Morton, Marty Holden, Kim Marcy, Cameron Wright, Duane Marcy, Jake Hudson, and Kelly Kanicki

The March 4 Community meeting presentations and the proposed Revitalization Plan can be downloaded from pierponttownship.com