



November 22, 2016

Editor  
The Columbus Dispatch  
62 East Broad Street  
P.O. Box 1289  
Columbus, Ohio 43216

TRANSMITTED VIA EMAIL

Dear Editor:

The Prairie Township Board of Trustees has been following recent recommendations that the City of Columbus increase its water and sewer rates with much interest. We, as members of the Board, were interested to read the Dispatch articles on this topic on November 11, 2016 and November 22, 2016. We were especially interested in the rate comparison that the November 11<sup>th</sup> article entitled "Columbus to boost rates 2.9% for 2017." The article includes a comparison of water and sewer rates in Columbus vs. area suburbs connected to the Columbus regional water and sewer system. This comparison shows typical Columbus rates increasing from \$694.08 to \$1,102.74 from 2007 to 2017 as opposed to typical suburban rates increasing from \$743.08 to \$1,211.65 during the same period.

Seeing this comparison in the Dispatch gives the Board the opportunity to point out that customers of the Franklin County Sanitary Engineer's water and sewer system, which is served by the Columbus regional system as are the suburbs mentioned in the article, pay typical costs that far exceed the typical costs paid by customers in those suburbs. The Sanitary Engineer's system consists of service areas scattered across the County that are home to its 4,000 household water / 6,000 household wastewater customer base. A September 21, 2014 Dispatch article stated that Franklin County customers paid 84% more than City of Columbus customers, a situation that has changed little if any in the last two years. Meanwhile, according the figures in the November 11<sup>th</sup> Dispatch article, typical suburban rates are less than 10% higher than typical City of Columbus rates. Admittedly, part of this extra cost is the result of deferred maintenance and the related loss of a high percentage of the water, which is purchased wholesale from Columbus, to leakage and other inefficiencies. However, the fact that this small utility is forced by geography, as well as state and federal mandates, to construct and operate at a small scale in scattered areas of the County, is a driving factor behind the Franklin County Sanitary Engineer's much too high rates. These factors were highlighted in a 2014 analysis of the Franklin Count Sanitary Engineer's operations conducted by Raftelis Financial Consultants, which concluded that this agency's operations are not sustainable in their current form.

**Prairie Township**

23 Maple Drive / Columbus, OH 43228

phone: (614) 878-3317 / fax: (614) 878-0566

**prairietownship.org**

*Board of Trustees:* Ronald Ball, Steve Kennedy, Doug Stormont  
*Fiscal Officer:* F. Dan McCardle / *Administrator:* Tracy Hatmaker

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All of this points to the fact that the current Franklin County setup is a bad business model that results in bad public policy. The gross inefficiencies of the Franklin County Sanitary Engineer's system lead to costs that cannot be sustained by its limited customer base. Under the current setup, this customer base is singled out to pay for federal and state mandates, as well as to pay for service to existing areas covering far flung locations in Franklin County. The result is that this small group of residents, which by and large consists of working class households with modest incomes, is paying for far more than their share of what is really a responsibility that should be borne by residents throughout the Columbus regional system. Franklin County and the City of Columbus should follow the recommendations of the Raftelis Study and work to merge this system into the larger City of Columbus system. This will result in fair water and sewer rates and stronger communities in neighborhoods throughout Central Ohio.

Sincerely,

PRAIRIE TOWNSHIP BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Steve Kennedy, Chair

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Doug Stormont, Vice-Chair

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Ronald Ball, Trustee