



December 19, 2023

Limited Environmental Review and Finding of No Significant Impact

**Board of County Commissioners of Hamilton County, Ohio – Hamilton County
SCWWTP Thickening and Settlement Improvements
Loan number: CS391525-0175**

The attached Limited Environmental Review (LER) is for a wastewater treatment plant improvement project in Cincinnati which the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency intends to finance through its Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) below-market interest rate revolving loan program. The LER describes the project, its costs, and expected environmental benefits. Making available this LER fulfills Ohio EPA's environmental review and public notice requirements for this loan program.

Ohio EPA analyzes environmental effects of proposed projects as part of its WPCLF program review and approval process. We have concluded that the proposed project should not result in significant adverse environmental impacts. This project's relatively narrow scope and lack of environmental impacts qualifies it for the LER rather than a more comprehensive Environmental Assessment. More information can be obtained by calling or writing the person named at the end of the attached LER.

Upon issuance of this Finding of No Significant Impact (FNSI) determination, award of funds may proceed without further environmental review or public comment unless new information shows that environmental conditions of the proposed project have changed significantly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kathleen Courtright".

Kathleen Courtright, Assistant Chief
Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance

Attachment

LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

Project Identification

Project: SCWWTP Thickening and Settlement Improvements

Applicant: Board of County Commissioners of Hamilton County, Ohio
138 East Court Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Loan Number: CS391525-0175



Figure 1. Hamilton County

Project Summary

The Board of County Commissioners of Hamilton County, Ohio (Board) has requested funding from the Ohio Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) to finance the Sycamore Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant (SCWWTP) Thickening and Settlement Improvements project. Work for this facilities improvement project will include improvements to the SCWWTP to increase efficiency and reliability.

History & Existing Conditions

The Board, based in Hamilton County (Figure 1) is responsible for the Metropolitan Sewer District of Greater Cincinnati (MSDGC), also known as the Metropolitan Sewer District (MSD). MSD operates a number of different wastewater treatment plants (WWTPs) within the City of Cincinnati, including the SCWWTP. This WWTP serves eastern Hamilton County and can treat up to 50 million gallons per day (MGD) of wastewater.

The SCWWTP is in need of several upgrades in order to continue operating efficiently. The first is upgrades to the plant's two sludge thickeners. The first gravity thickener is offline and the second is overloaded. This project will bring the first thickener online and replace any necessary parts. Additional upgrades include improving odor control and the aeration tanks to address aging equipment. Foam in the aeration tanks is currently getting trapped inside the tanks, reducing efficiency. The tanks will be modified so that the foam can continue on through the treatment process.

Project Description

This project consists of three main upgrades within the SCWWTP. First is upgrades to the plant's two sludge thickeners, second is improving odor control, and third is upgrades to the aeration tanks to reduce foam trapping. These upgrades will improve the efficiency and reliability of the WWTP. See Figure 2 below for a map of the project location.



Figure 2. Sycamore Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant

Implementation

The Board proposes to borrow \$5,700,000 from the Ohio WPCLF at an interest rate of 3.08%. WPCLF interest rates are set monthly and may change for a later loan award. Assuming a 20-year loan, borrowing this amount could save the Board approximately \$900,600 over the life of the loan compared to the current market rate of 4.33%.

There are no sewer rate increases scheduled as a result of this project. The average annual sewer bill for residents served by the Board is \$597. This is 1.3% of the median household income (MHI: \$45,235) and is slightly higher than the Ohio average annual sewer bill, \$490. Construction began in March 2023 and is scheduled to be completed in approximately 15 months.

Public Participation

Two public budget hearings were held each year in 2019, 2020, and 2021 that discussed this project. An additional public meeting was held on September 15th, 2022, that authorized construction funding for the project.

Ohio EPA is unaware of opposition to or controversy about the project. Ohio EPA will make a copy of this document available to the public on its web page: <https://epa.ohio.gov/divisions-and-offices/environmental-financial-assistance/announcements> and will provide it on request to interested parties.

Conclusion

The proposed project meets the criteria for a Limited Environmental Review (LER); namely, it is an action within an existing public wastewater treatment system, which involves the functional replacement of and improvements to existing WWTP mechanical equipment. Furthermore, the project meets the other qualifying criteria for an LER; specifically, the proposed project:

Will have no significant environmental effect, will require no specific impact mitigation, and will have no effect on high-value environmental resources because the construction will be taking place inside of an existing WWTP that has experienced previous excavation. There are no high-value environmental resources in this developed area.

Is cost effective and is not a controversial action because there is no viable alternative to replacing failing mechanical equipment within a WWTP. Ohio EPA is unaware of controversy about or opposition to this project.

Does not create a new, or relocate an existing, discharge to surface or ground waters, and will not result in substantial increases in the volume of discharge or the loading of pollutants from an existing source or from new facilities to receiving waters and will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population because this project merely upgrades existing equipment in the WWTP and has no other effect on discharges. Service will not be extended in any way nor provide additional capacity.

Based upon Ohio EPA's review of the planning information and the materials presented in this Limited Environmental Review, we have concluded that there will be no significant adverse impacts from the proposed project as it relates to the environmental features discussed previously. This is because these features do not exist in the project area, the features exist but will not be adversely affected, or the impacts will be temporary and mitigated. This project will ensure that the SCWWTP continues to operate efficiently and provide service to Cincinnati.

Contact Information

Anna Johnson
Ohio EPA – DEFA – OFA
PO Box 1049
Columbus, Ohio 43215

Email: Anna.Johnson@epa.ohio.gov