



DANIEL HARRIGAN, MAYOR

PRESS RELEASE



AkronWaterways
Renewed!

For Immediate Release

Contact:

Annie McFadden, Deputy Mayor for Administration
AMcFadden@akronohio.gov or 330-375-2754

Heather Bolestridge, AWR! Communications Manager
HBolestridge@akronwaterwaysrenewed.com

City of Akron Celebrates Progress in Consent Decree Projects

92% of projects are completed or under construction and Akron continues to improve the water quality of the Cuyahoga River through innovative technologies and green options, while lowering the overall project cost

Akron, Ohio, October 30, 2019 – The City of Akron celebrated significant progress in upgrading its sewer infrastructure through the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)-mandated Consent Decree (CD) program. The CD was filed in 2009 with the Federal Court, exactly a decade ago, and approved by the Federal Court in 2014. The CD requires Akron to make significant improvements to its sewer system and wastewater treatment plant to reduce combined sewer overflows and bypasses.

As of this week, 92% of all CD projects are either completed or under construction. In all, 65% of the 26 CD projects have been completed on time or ahead of schedule, 27% are currently under construction, and only 8% are in the planning/design stage. All projects are scheduled to be completed by 2027. By working with the U.S. and Ohio EPAs to find better solutions over the last decade, Akron has reduced the overall cost of the program, improved environmental benefits, reduced impact on park areas, the Towpath Trail and on local neighborhoods, all while putting Akronites to work in our locally-funded projects.

The original CD included 5 sewer separation projects to eliminate overflow points, multiple storage basins, and two tunnels to store overflows during wet weather events. In addition, the City was required to increase treatment capacity at the City's wastewater treatment plant, the Water Reclamation Facility (WRF). Akron consistently looked for ways to improve the overall CD projects with the latest technology and options.

Upgrading the originally approved projects required cooperation, data, and analysis. In Akron, changes stemmed from the [Integrated Planning](#) process in which the city looked at each combined sewer overflow (CSO) and considered the Triple Bottom Line for sewer separations, green infrastructure, storage basins, and additional conveyances. This process led to an agreement with the EPAs to replace five storage basins with sewer separations, green infrastructure and additional conveyance. Examples of these improvements can be seen at the Middlebury Separation/Green Project, the Kelly Green/Additional Conveyance Project, and on the Aqueduct Street Project, Akron's first "Complete/Green Street." The modifications to the CD mean that Akron citizens see better integrated, green infrastructure projects that fit into their neighborhoods, rather than large gray storage basins that disrupt aesthetics and curb appeal.

Over the years, Akron has advanced multiple improvements to the originally approved upgrades and continues to develop ways to improve upon this program. In 2015, U.S. EPA approved of Akron's proposal to use green infrastructure along with sewer separation to eliminate the need of two of the originally required storage basins. In 2016, the City received federal court approval for the First Amendment to the CD, providing for an alternative project to rehabilitate the Main Outfall Sewer in the Merriman Valley and a change in the sequencing of projects at the WRF. These changes resulted in greater environmental benefits, less disturbance and impact to park lands, including the Towpath Trail, and financial savings.

In 2018, the Ohio and U.S. EPAs approved a proposed Second Amendment that incorporates the use of improved technology at the WRF, and the replacement of two storage basins with the combination of green infrastructure and additional conveyance (placing more flow into the interceptor sewer by taking advantage of available capacity). These upgrades will save \$77 million and improve the overall project. The changes

are pending in federal court right now, and the City is hopeful for a timely approval based on the significant benefits and broad support, including from the Cuyahoga Valley National Park, Summit Metro Parks, Friends of the Crooked River and many more.

With 65% of the projects completed, the environmental improvements have been significant. The improvement has been so strong that earlier this year, American Rivers named the Cuyahoga “River of the Year” to celebrate its environmental resurgence. Only 50 years after the Cuyahoga river fires on the “dead” river, EPA testing now shows that nearly every area of the river moved from *poor* or *fair* to *good* or *exceptional* in testing for important fish and bug species. And the great blue herons have returned to the River. Further, 100 miles of the River was recently designated as a State Water Trail, making it ideal for the expansion of recreational, educational and economic development opportunities with improvement to the quality of life for Akron residents.

This year, the Ohio Canal Interceptor Tunnel was recognized for excellence by Tunnel Business Magazine. In recognizing this important project, Tunnel Business Magazine touted the innovative technology through difficult ground conditions as supporting the award. Although the tunneling portion of the project is complete, the overall project is behind and now is scheduled for completion in 2020. Once complete, the tunnel will have the ability to store approximately 27 million gallons of combined sewage per rain event with subsequent treatment at the WRF. In a typical year, the tunnel will prevent nearly 450 million gallons of combined sewage from going into the local waterways.

While the Akron ratepayers have to bear the burden of funding the CD mandated projects, the City of Akron continues to look for ways to save money and resources. The City has saved \$83 million on project costs plus an additional \$118 million through innovative financing.

Mayor Horrigan is committed to pursuing every possible, responsible option available to defer and minimize any future rate increases for Akron customers, while upholding the City’s obligations to protect the environment and invest in infrastructure for this and future generations. The infrastructure constructed through the Consent Decree will serve the citizens of Akron for the next 100 years. While being held to the strictest requirements in the nation, through use of current technology and green infrastructure options, the City of Akron is proud of the progress made through 2019 and looks forward to continued innovation and real-world solutions. Akron will continue working with the EPAs to ensure that residents receive strong value and a clean environment from the mandated CD projects.

For more information and photo galleries, visit www.akronwaterwaysrenewed.com.

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