

8 Utilities

8.1 Introduction

The size and dispersed population of Leroy Township make it a challenge to provide the same level of utility services as that enjoyed by more heavily populated townships and municipalities in the Cleveland area.

Section 2.3 of this plan, which describes some of the challenges that face Leroy Township, discusses the lack of sewer and water service in Leroy Township. The extension of sewer and water services into a growing exurban area will spawn residential and commercial development. Sewer and water service, and the lack thereof, acts as an unofficial growth control mechanism. Without sewer and water service, the land can only support limited uses: agriculture, low density residential development, and commercial uses that generate little or no wastewater.

The intent of the Utilities element of the Comprehensive Plan is to use urban-level utilities, or the lack of them, to shape the built environment and protect the township's rural character, while still allowing it to prosper.

Please note this is not a capital improvement plan. A capital improvement plan is a budgetary document that links the programming of capital projects, such as public utilities, to the planning goals found in this document.

8.2 Sewer and water service

With one exception, Leroy Township does not have central sewer or water service.

The 1984 plan did not establish any goals or policies for sewer and water service, except to state that “the possibility of extending water service is being researched,” and that establishment and expansion of sewer and water service would probably not be widespread. The 1984 plan spelled out possible routes for water lines, east from Painesville Township under Carter Road or Painesville-Warren Road, but noted that such an extension may not be economically feasible. The findings of the research mentioned in the 1984 plan are unknown.

Water service

All residences and businesses in Leroy Township get their water supply from individual wells or tanker truck shipments. The closest water lines are in Concord Township, at the intersection of Concord-Hamden Road and Girdled Road, by the Concord Air Park, and on Painesville-Warren Road at the intersection of Rio Vista Court, by Helen Hazen Wyman Metropark.

These water lines are serviced by the City of Painesville. Leroy Township is considered part of the Lake County Utilities Water Service District. To extend these lines into Leroy, the Board of County Commissioners would need to amend the county water district boundaries, and the City of Painesville would have to redesign their system.

The most likely path for a future water line would be from South Ridge Road, across the Grand River Valley in the Vrooman Road area.

Sewer service

Most properties in Leroy Township, outside of Lester Drive, depend on on-site septic systems, or what the Lake County Health District refers to as “household sewage disposal systems” (HSDS), for wastewater disposal.

The Lake County Utilities Department Master Sewer Plan has included Leroy Township as part of the Heatherstone Sanitary Sewer District, but there are no plans to extend sanitary sewer into Leroy Township at this time. If sanitary sewer were to be extended, it would be extended from the sewer line runs along South Ridge Road, near the Vrooman Road intersection. Plans call for building a pump station at the bottom of the Grand River valley, and force main

under the river to the existing gravity sewer at the intersection of Vrooman Road, Madison Avenue and South Ridge Road.

Sunshine Acres package plant

The Sunshine Acres #2 subdivision is the only development in Leroy to have sanitary sewer service. The subdivision is served by a package treatment plant, located at the intersection of Lester Drive and Painesville-Warren Road. The package plant, maintained by Lake County since 1968, was built in 1963 and upgraded in 1988. The small plant cannot be expanded to serve other development in the area. However, the development does not have public or communal water service; water is provided by individual wells on each lot.

Implications of future sewer and water service

The unavailability of sewer and water service are the major barriers to development in Leroy Township.

The cost of building a public sewer and water system to serve the entire township would be prohibitively expensive, because homes and businesses are more scattered than in urban and suburban areas. Longer sewer and water lines would be needed to serve fewer customers than in other sewered areas of Lake County.

At the time this plan was written, sanitary sewer service cannot be expanded into Leroy Township because the closest treatment plant, Heatherstone, cannot be expanded. However, the Board of County Commissioners entered into an agreement with the City of Painesville to service the eastern half of Painesville Township. Currently, this area has limited sewer service provided by the Heatherstone facility. With the new agreement, areas that are serviced by Heatherstone will be switched to the City of Painesville facility. This may open up limited capacity for Leroy Township.

The availability of sewer and water service could make suburban-type residential development economically and environmentally feasible. However, conventional subdivisions, similar to what is found in Concord Township or Painesville Township, would harm Leroy's rural character, and the township would have only limited power to control it.

The lack of sewer and water service keeps the township's overall capacity for development low, and preserves the low-density rural and exurban residential character many residents find important. To maintain the desired character of the township, providing water service to serve residential consumers outside of the Five Points Roundabout area is not recommended, unless aquifers are drying much faster than they can be recharged. Likewise, sewer service is not recommended for residential customers outside of the Five Points Roundabout area.

However, not having sewer or water service could harm the township's commercial environment. Most retail and commercial uses desired by town residents, such as supermarkets and sit-down restaurants, create more wastewater than what can be handled by an on-site system. EPA regulations prohibit package plants that could otherwise serve limited commercial uses, because they would hurt the nearly pristine Grand River Wild and Scenic watershed.

Unsewered commercial districts in other rural and exurban communities are typically dominated by vehicle-related uses, such as auto and truck dealers, tire stores, gas stations, auto repair and body shops, and heavy equipment rental; and low-end commercial uses such as mini-storage facilities and contractor yards. Mechanical commercial uses generate little wastewater, so the lack of a sewer system is not a critical factor in their site selection. Mechanical commercial businesses tend to agglomerate in an area, which can discourage other types of businesses from considering a location there, and ultimately present a poor impression of the host community.

Vrooman Road is the primary gateway to Leroy Township. A concentration or strip of low-end commercial uses at the I-90 interchange and along the corridor south to Five Points Roundabout would hurt the character of the township, and be considered undesirable by most township residents. A commercial area dominated by small vehicle-related businesses and low-end commercial uses would not provide less property tax revenue than an area with a variety of retail uses and services. The lack of sewers also limits potential industrial uses – and the accompanying property tax revenue – to a few that generate little wastewater. There are two ways to limit the spread of low-end commercial development; restrict such uses in the zoning resolution, or extend sewer and water

lines into the Township to serve commercial areas. Using zoning to limit such uses would probably be the “path of least resistance.”

Does the township have a choice?

There are two ways that sewer service could be forced onto the township, against the desires of its leaders and residents.

A developer of a subdivision or any other type of development in the township may petition the Lake County Utilities Department to extend the boundaries of the county sewer district – and sewer and water service – into the township. The developer would pay for the sewer, with some costs reimbursed by collecting a fee from others who connect into the extended sewer and water line.

Leroy Township does not have the power to create a “sewerless” sewer district of its own. It is also powerless to prohibit a neighboring sewer district from extending its service boundaries into the township.

Also, the technology of sewage treatment is advancing rapidly. There may soon be small package plants that operate with no waste discharge. If such technology is approved by the EPA for use in the Grand River watershed, a developer could build a subdivision and equip it with its own sewer system. Again, the township would be powerless to stop it.

8.3 Electricity

CEI / First Energy provides electrical service to the entire township.

A major electrical substation is located in Leroy Center, east of Paine Road. Transmission lines from the CEI Perry Nuclear Power Plant run north-south through the center of the township.

Most electric utility lines in the township are above ground, strung on poles placed in the public right-of-way. Utility lines are buried in three newer subdivisions. The county subdivision regulations require underground utilities, but there is no burial requirement for the lot splits that comprise most land division activity in the township.

If commercial development occurs along the Vrooman Road corridor and Five Points roundabout area, the township should require burial of existing overhead utilities as a prerequisite for development.

Undergrounding existing utility lines is expensive; more so in low-density exurban communities. Nonetheless, the township should work towards a long-term goal of placing all utility lines underground. New electrical substations should be carefully placed, and well-designed and screened so they are visually unobtrusive.

CEI / First Energy has not announced any plans to provide broadband over power line (BPL) service in Leroy Township or Lake County.

8.4 Natural gas

Limited areas in Leroy Township receive natural gas. In parts of the township where gas is not available, residents depend on truck-delivered propane, electricity, and even fuel from on-site woodlots for heating and/or cooking. Electric heating is far more costly than natural gas.

The township is working with natural gas suppliers towards a goal of providing service throughout the entire township.

8.5 Telephone / DSL

Leroy Township is served by two telephone companies; AT&T in the 44077 Zip code, and Windstream in areas underlying the 44086 (Thompson) Zip code and 44057 (Madison) Zip Code. Windstream broadband Internet

service is available in much of Leroy Township; service availability depends on proximity to central switching offices. AT&T has introduced U Verse to Leroy Township.

Telephone lines and electrical lines are above ground in most parts of the township, except in areas developed under the Lake County Subdivision Regulations. Those areas are required to have their utilities placed underground.

8.6 Cable television / cable broadband

Time Warner Cable provides cable television and high speed Internet access throughout Leroy Township. Cable lines are above ground in areas of the township where electrical lines are also overhead.

AT&T provides access to U Verse to their service area in Leroy Township. These areas include everything that is located in 44077 zip code. Areas in the 44086 zip code are serviced by Windstream Telephone Company.

8.7 Goals and policies

Each primary paragraph is a statement of a goal. The subparagraphs are policies for implementing the goal.

UT-1 On-site septic and well systems will continue to provide sewer and water service for most of the township.

UT-1-P1 Preserve rural character by discouraging new central sewer and water service in the township

UT-2 The visual impact of wired utilities will be decreased.

UT-2-P1 Encourage utility companies to work with property owners and lessees when siting utility facilities.

UT-2-P2 Require undergrounding of existing overhead utility lines when commercial development occurs on the site.

UT-2-P3 Work towards a long-term goal of undergrounding all wired utilities in the township.