



Mike DeWine, Governor  
Jon Husted, Lt. Governor  
Laurie A. Stevenson, Director

September 2, 2020

**Limited Environmental Review and Finding of No Significant Impact**

**City of Athens – Athens County  
Athens City-County Regionalization Solids Handling Improvements  
Loan number: CS390124-0027**

The attached Limited Environmental Review (LER) is for a solids handling and dewatering improvements project in Athens 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,

*Jonathan Bernstein*

Jonathan Bernstein, Assistant Chief  
Division of Environmental and Financial Assistance

Attachment

## LIMITED ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

### **Project Identification**

Project: Athens City-County Regionalization Solids Handling Improvements

Applicant: Thomas D. Pyle, Interim Service-Safety Director  
City of Athens  
8 East Washington Street  
Athens, OH 45701

Loan Number: CS390124-0027

### **Project Summary**

The City of Athens has applied for a Ohio Water Pollution Control Loan Fund (WPCLF) loan for the Regionalization Solids Handling Improvements project. Athens has requested to borrow approximately \$3,700,000 to pay for sludge dewatering facilities that will be added to their existing wastewater treatment plant (WWTP).

### **History & Existing Conditions**

The City of Athens is located in Athens County (Figure 1), along the Hocking River. Athens owns and operates a 4.8 million gallons per day (mgd) WWTP on the southeast side of the city. The City of Athens WWTP was built in the 1950's with improvements as recent as 2015 and is currently operating below its design capacity at approximately 2.5 mgd. The collection system consists of gravity sewers, intercepting sewers, twenty pumping stations, and a force main. The WWTP facilities consist of an influent pumping station and control building, equalization basin (for wet weather), aerated grit removal, manual bar screening, primary clarifiers, aeration, final clarification, and chlorine disinfection. Biosolids treatment currently includes aerobic digestion of primary and waste activated sludge, where sludge is stored in a holding tank until it is pumped to the loading station for land application.

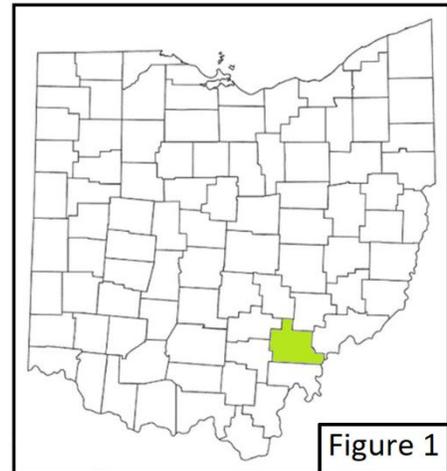
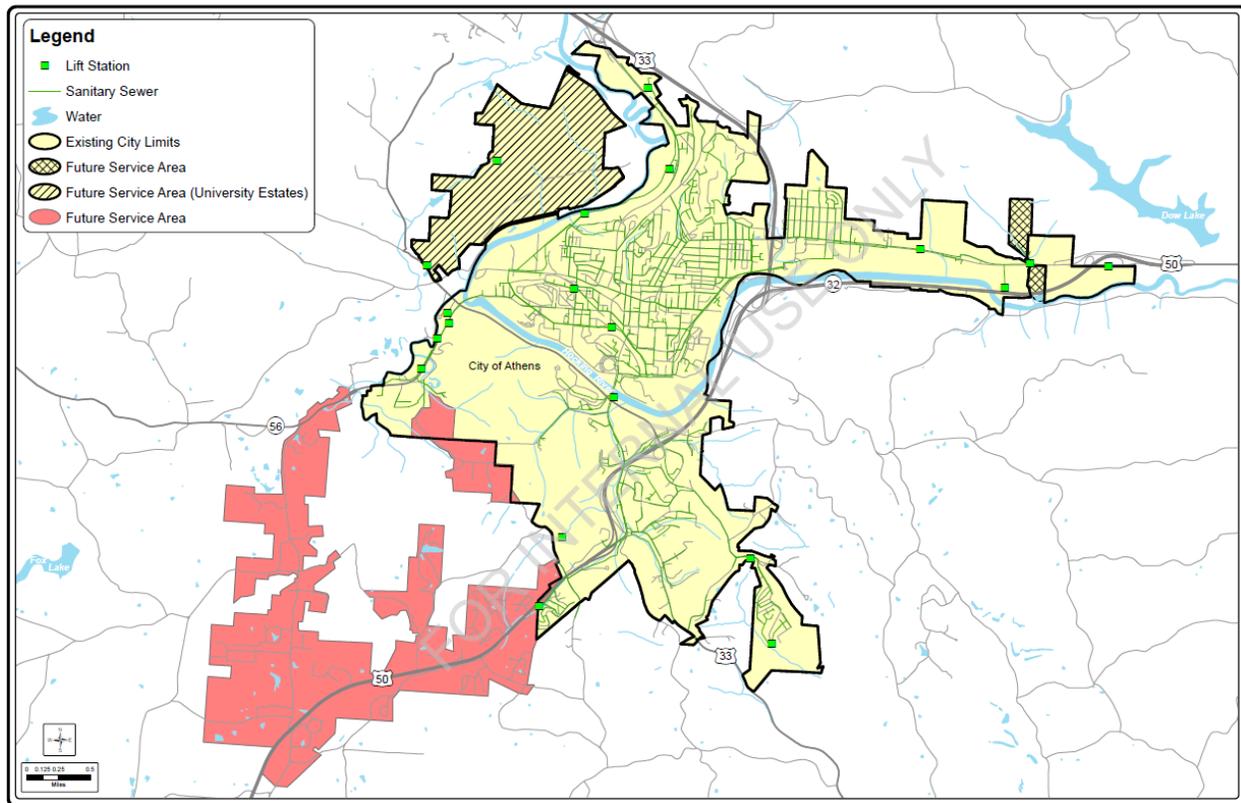


Figure 1

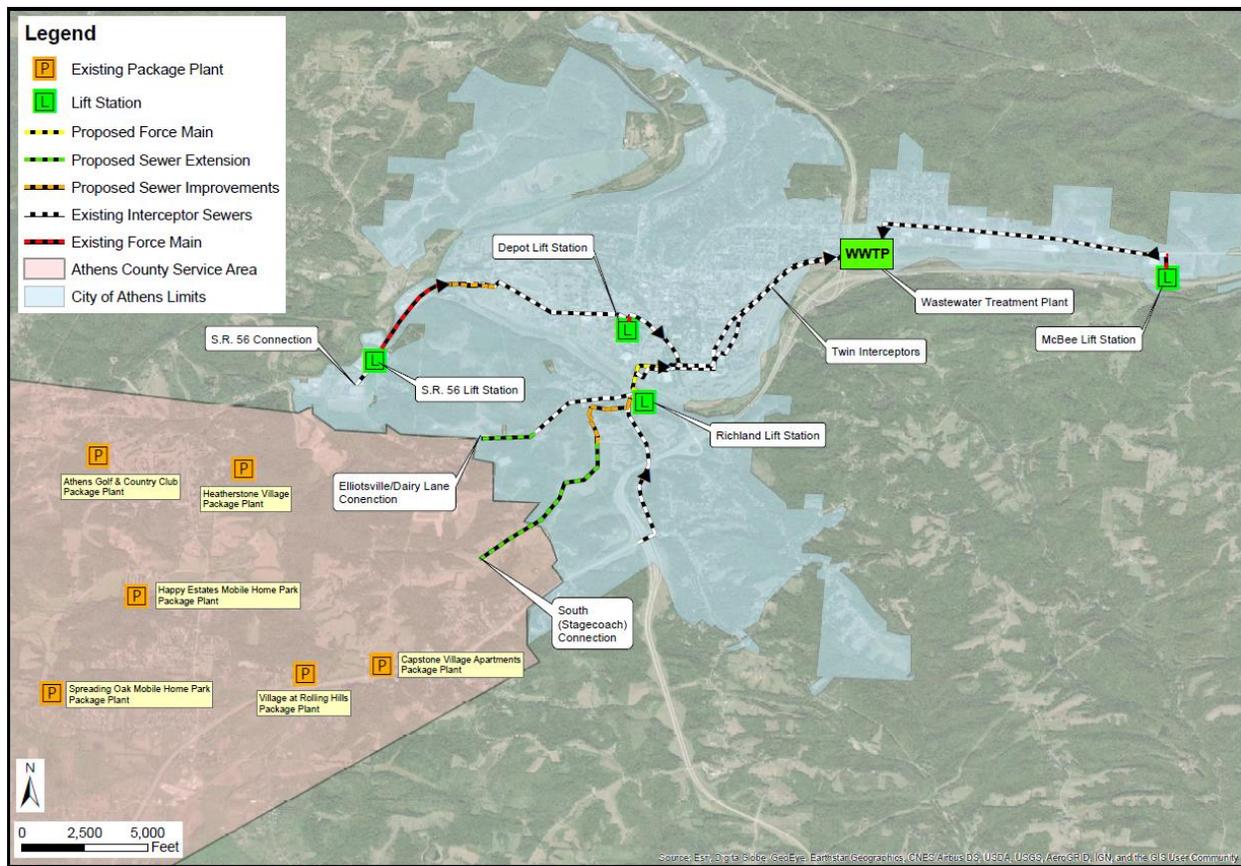
The US Route 50 corridor has experienced development in residential, commercial, and small industrial areas between New Albany and Athens. As a response to an Ohio EPA investigation of unsanitary contamination of water resources in the 1990's Athens County studied the feasibility of central sanitary waste collection and treatment for the US 50 corridor. This area has approximately 1,100 user accounts. Sewage flow estimates for the planning area are approximately 487,000 gallons per day (gpd). Wastewater flow projections estimate a 0.3% per year general population growth, resulting in approximately 1,500 users predicted by the year 2030, at 600,000 gpd average flow.

The long-term sewer collection study area includes several residential subdivisions in the US 50 corridor area including: Valley view, Clearview, Pine Grove Heights, University Heights, Fullview

Heights, Wonder Hills, Radford Road and adjacent local collector streets, and other dense residential areas within this target area. Many residents of this area use household sewage treatment systems to treat their wastewater and are at a high rate of system failure. There are also six package wastewater plants in the US 50 area, which will be taken offline after the Athens WWTP improvements are complete and the Athens WWTP can accept these flows. In 2011, the project was revisited and assessed as a candidate for regionalized treatment of flows from the US 50 area. As part of a multi-phased sewer collection, treatment, and regionalization project, these US 50 corridor residential areas have been identified to be connected to a centralized wastewater collection system for sewage to be treated at the Athens WWTP. The City of Athens will accept the flow from these subdivisions and surrounding area, and in preparation will need to make several improvements to their WWTP to handle the increased flow and biosolids.



**Figure 2. Map of Athens city limits in yellow, and future sewer regionalization service areas in red and striped areas, where wastewater will be collected from and treated at the Athens WWTP.**



**Figure 3. Map of Athens and SR 50 corridor area highlighted in red showing existing package plants marked in orange, lift stations in green, and the location of the Athens WWTP in green.**

### **Project Description**

This project involves the construction of sludge dewatering facility improvements to handle a 35% increase in biosolids from the new regionalization flows that will be accepted from the surrounding US 50 corridor. A new two-story dewatering building will be constructed at the WWTP, where the dewatering unit will be located on the second floor for loading dewatered sludge into trucks below.

Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition (SCADA) Development Services will be added and improved. New computers, software, and a firewall router will be purchased as part of the dewatering improvements project.

This project only involves dewatering facility improvements that will be made at the existing Athens WWTP and is in preparation for regionalization efforts of the US 50 area.

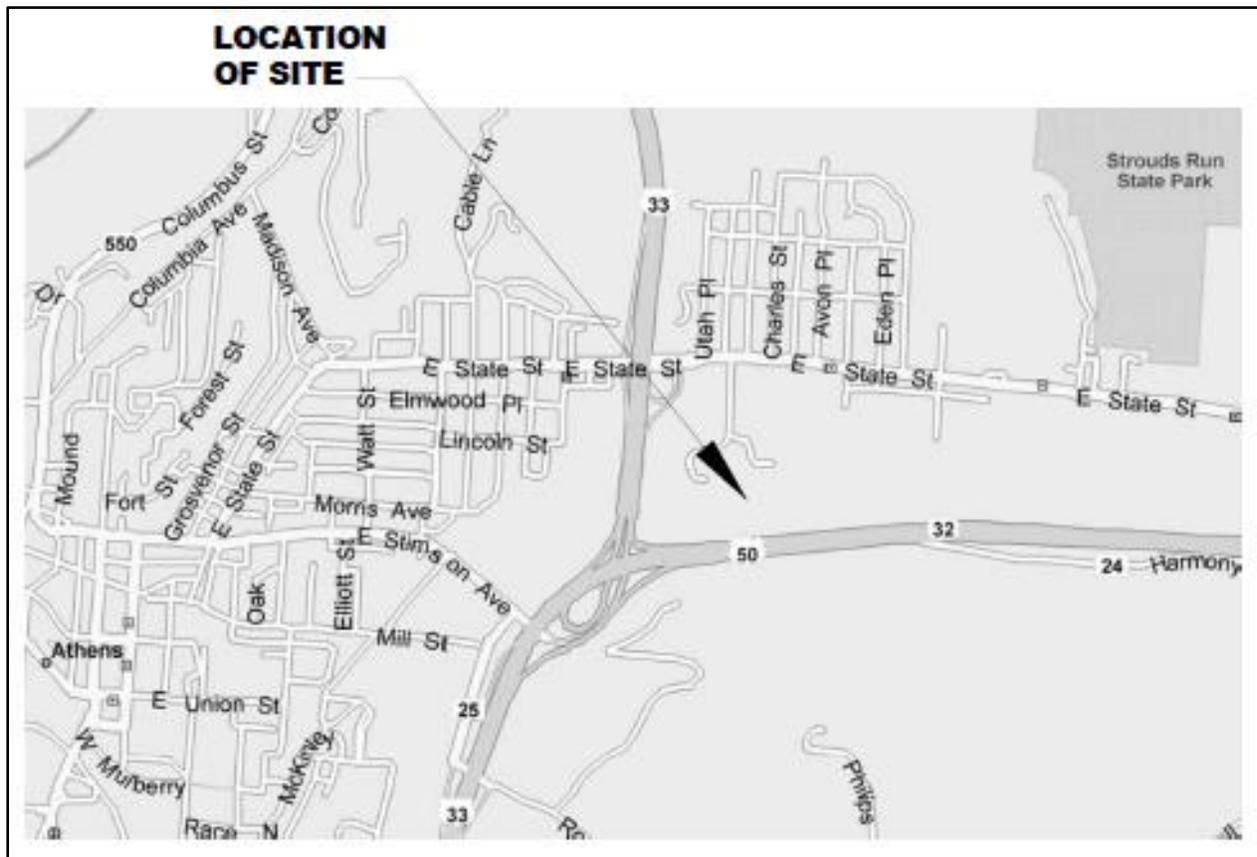


Figure 3. WWTP site location

### **Implementation**

Athens will borrow approximately \$3,750,000 from WPCLF to pay for the construction of biosolids handling improvements at the Athens WWTP. The City qualifies for a 0% regionalization discount interest rate. During the 30-year loan period, Athens will save \$1,242,367 by using WPCLF dollars at this rate, compared to the market rate of 1.98%.

### *Local Economy*

A typical residential customer living in the City of Athens is currently paying \$547 per year for sewer service. The most recent sewer rate increase was 8%. Sewer rate increases of 2-5% per year will be reviewed annually and implemented to repay the loan and allow continued maintenance and improvement of these services. According to the 2013-2017 American Community Survey, the estimated median household income (MHI) for a resident of Athens is \$24,326. The average yearly sewer costs amount to \$547, which is 2.2% of the MHI and is generally considered affordable.

### *Project Schedule*

Anticipating loan award in September 2020, construction will begin shortly after and be complete by winter 2021.

## **Public Participation**

The City has held monthly public council meetings where the project was discussed, and residents encouraged to attend. Construction schedule updates will be conveyed by articles in the local newspaper and on the City website. Ohio EPA is unaware of any opposition to this project.

## **Conclusion**

The proposed project meets the project type criteria for a Limited Environmental Review (LER); namely, it is an action within an existing public wastewater treatment and collection system, which involves the construction of sludge dewatering facility improvements. Furthermore, the project meets the other qualifying criteria for an LER; specifically, the proposed project:

**Will have no significant environmental effect and will require no specific impact mitigation and no effect on high-value environmental resources** because all construction for this project will occur at the existing WWTP property. Silt fencing will be installed around ground disturbing activity to prevent stormwater from washing silt into the Hocking River, which is adjacent to the WWTP, and grass will be replanted on bare soil to prevent erosion on disturbed ground.

**Is cost-effective and not a controversial action** because the City of Athens is upgrading facilities at their existing WWTP, and this project is part of a larger regionalization effort. The regionalization of the Rt 50 corridor will accept the flows of multiple subdivisions and take several package plants offline. This project loan will not require specific sewer rate increases and will be repaid through annual rate raises of 2-5%. Ohio EPA is not aware of any 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** because the goal of this project is to increase solids handling capacity, and dewatering of treated sludge efficiency. Improvements to increase the solids handling capacity will not result in any changes to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permitting and will not change discharge amounts or qualities. The additional wastewater accepted due to regionalization and subsequent sludge will be dewatered and disposed of offsite in the appropriate landfills and land application as fertilizer.

**Will not provide capacity to serve a population substantially greater than the existing population** because the project will not be increasing the average design flow of 4.8 mgd for the WWTP. The additional wastewater flows that Athens will accept from the Rt 50 corridor area are existing residential homes, and are not new development, nor will this project provide for the capacity to serve a substantial amount of new development.

The planning activities for the project have identified no potentially significant adverse impacts. The project is expected to have no significant short-term or long-term adverse impacts on the quality of the human environment or on sensitive resources (surface waters, coastal zones, floodplains, wetlands, state-designated scenic or recreational rivers, prime or unique agricultural lands, aquifer recharge zones, archaeologically or historically significant sites, threatened or endangered species, or state and federal wildlife areas).

## **Contact information**

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