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Environmental group asks for federal judgement over Hattiesburg sewer treatment

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By Margaret Ann Morgan [CONNECT](#)

HATTIESBURG, MS (WDAM) - The City of Hattiesburg is facing a lawsuit by Gulf Restoration Network (GRN) for its inability to meet sewer treatment standards under existing law.

The suit was filed in 2012, and an economist submitted his expert opinion last month for a discovery deadline. In that opinion, Jonathan Shefftz states that the city's inability to make changes to the sewer treatment has prevented the city from spending 7.2 to 15 million dollars.

Shefftz began these calculations in 2007 after the city was issued its first violation. But according to council president Kim Bradley, the work to get the new land application system to treat the waste water has complied with the Mississippi Department of Environmental Quality contract so far.

"We had these issues under control," said Bradley. "We had not had a violation in some time, but now we do. We're working to get this solved, but the GRN will try to use this as a leverage to get us into court."

According to the opinion, the Hattiesburg is liable for at least 4,962 Clean Water Act violations. Since the first violation in 2007, the city did not come to an agreement on a treatment facility until January of this year.

After the 4-1 vote to support the Groundworx contract with the understanding that sewer rates would increase, the council then voted a few weeks later 3-2 to hike those rates to begin payments on the interest of the facility. One week later the mayor vetoed that decision, and one week after that, the council reached a unanimous decision to present a vote on a sales tax increase to pay for operating costs. Now the facility and the contract are at a stand-still while the council decides on how it will move forward with both operation and costs.

"We understand that we've really done nothing with our aeration," said Bradley. "We have a contract that's been laying around and hasn't been exercised and put in place. We need to get a handle on what's going on."

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