

## **AFSC Positions on Akron Issues 8 and 9**

The Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee opposes Akron Issue 8 and supports Akron Issue 9 on the November 4 ballot.

### **BACKGROUND**

Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic at the conclusion of his State of the City address in February 2008 proposed selling the city's sewer system to finance scholarships for Akron city students. His proposal was based on a scholarship program established in Kalamazoo, MI as a method to retain students from leaving the city.

Shortly thereafter, the Northeast Ohio American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) organized several showings in Akron of *Thirst*, a film documenting the impact of water privatization in the US and abroad. The film showings attracted sewer workers, other laborers, neighborhood residents, environmentalists and others concerned about the negative impact of the privatization of public utilities, such as rising rates, declining services, and loss of public control.

AFSC organized attendees to discuss how to react and proact to the mayor's proposal. The coalition, Citizens to Save our Sewers and Water (or Citizens SOS), was subsequently formed. The coalition agreed to pressure their city councilpersons to oppose any privatization of the sewer system. Concerns over the lack of independence of city council from the mayor, however, led to a second approach — organizing a citizen initiative calling for any sale, lease or transfer of any public utility to be without force unless and until voted on by Akron citizens. "Let the People Decide" was a grassroots campaign slogan.

The coalition sponsored a forum in May featuring a speaker from Food and Water Watch in Washington, DC (which monitors water/sewer privatization issues) and the former head of the Municipal Utilities Department of Stockton, CA (which had privatized their utilities 5 years ago and, like many communities, were now re-municipalizing it)

Citizens SOS was, at first, predominately made up of neighborhood residents since the mayor stated publicly that only those sewer workers who opposed the sewer initiative would have their jobs

protected. AFSCME, which represents the sewer workers, responded by promising to protect sewer workers from any and all retaliation.

The coalition collected more than twice the number of signatures required to gain ballot status. Significant valid signatures were obtained with the initiative to appear on the November ballot.

More information: [www.AkronOhio.net](http://www.AkronOhio.net)

Recent AP story:

<http://money.cnn.com/news/newsfeeds/articles/apwire/c16b60ca54cdca401b7afe2255007c8c.htm>

Meanwhile, the mayor appointing an advisory committee in May to study his proposal. The committee was originally charged with taking at least 8 months to study the concept and make recommendations to the mayor. Upon learning of the citizen initiative, however, the mayor was forced to fast track the process. The committee in July approved a hastily prepared concept paper prepared by the mayor approving the idea of a scholarship plan funded through the lease (not sale) of the sewer system with exceedingly few details. The mayor also announced that he would take his plan directly to the voters.

A special city council meeting was called in August where a slightly more specific version of the plan was approved for voter consideration in November. Council voted against, however, placing three additional sewer privatization-related measures on the ballot that Citizens SOS felt were meant to confuse voters. The mayor's proposal can also be found at [www.AkronOhio.net](http://www.AkronOhio.net).

AFSC is working with Citizens SOS to defeat Issue 8 and pass Issue 9.

"We Hate 8 but 9 is Fine".