

ORIGINAL

In The
Supreme Court of Ohio

12-1307

ALLESANDRA RISCATTI, ET AL

Case No. _____

Plaintiffs-Appellees,

On Appeal from the Cuyahoga County
Court of Appeals, Eighth Appellate
District

v.

PRIME PROPERTIES LIMITED
PARTNERSHIP, ET AL

Court of Appeals
Case No. 97270

Defendants

DEFENDANT-APPELLANT CUYAHOGA COUNTY'S
MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT OF JURISDICTION

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I. EXPLANATION OF WHY THIS CASE IS OF PUBLIC OR GREAT GENERAL INTEREST AND INVOLVES A SUBSTANTIAL CONSTITUTIONAL QUESTION

This case presents the important legal issue of whether an order that denies a political subdivision the benefit of the two year limitations defense set forth in R.C. 2744.04 denies “the benefit of an alleged immunity from liability” making the denial a final appealable order under R.C. 2744.02(C). The Eighth District erred as a matter of law when it refused to exercise its jurisdiction over the trial court’s denial of the limitation defense raised by the Appellant, and its error presents an issue of public and great general interest to Ohio’s taxpayers and political subdivisions in these perilous economic times.

Pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(C) and this Court’s prior rulings, appellate courts possess subject matter jurisdiction over orders that deny the benefit of any alleged immunity or defense from liability as provided by R.C. 2744.02(C). Review of this case by the Supreme Court would answer the fundamental question of what the statutory language “a benefit of an alleged immunity” means for purposes of appellate jurisdiction, whether the denial of the limitations defense set forth in R.C. 2744.04 is a final appealable order, and what effect a Civil Rule 54(B) no just reason for delay determination regarding the defense, if any, has on appellate court jurisdiction when an appeal of right is taken under Chapter 2744. See *Mynes v. Brooks*, 124 Ohio St.3d 13 at ¶10, citing *Sullivan v. Anderson Twp.*, 122 Ohio St.3d 83 (2009) (“general rules regarding final, appealable orders in multi-party and/or multi-claim cases” that “involve the tandem of R.C.2505.02(B) for substance and Civ. R. 54(B) for procedure” do not apply in R.C. 2744.02 determinations).

Cuyahoga County (herein the “County”) asserts that recent decisions of this Court in *Sampson v. Cuyahoga Metropolitan Housing Authority*, 131 Ohio St. 3d 418, 422, 423 (2012),

Summerville v. Forest Park, 128 Ohio St.3d 221 (2010), *Hubbell v. City of Xenia*, 115 Ohio St.3d 77 (2007) and *Sullivan*, supra, make it clear that the legislature intended the interlocutory appeal provision to apply to the two year limitations defense set forth in R.C. 2744.04. No question exists that the defense and the immunity provisions contained in Chapter 2744 were expressly intended by the Legislature to eliminate untenable claims against political subdivisions at the earliest opportunity possible. Accordingly, it was error for the Eighth District to disregard the express legislative purpose of conserving and protecting the financial resources of the County and the decisions of this Court implementing the legislative scheme for that specific purpose.

At bar, one hundred (100) Plaintiffs belatedly sued numerous defendants --- a petroleum company, multiple owners of a service station and three political subdivisions in 2010 as a result of conduct that existed since 1982. More specifically, Plaintiffs' complaint alleges that since 1982 petroleum contaminated ground water from the Defendants' service station property drained into the public sanitary sewerage system, travelled through the public sanitary sewerage system and allowed vapors to enter each Plaintiffs' private sewerage line connected to the public system and thereafter into their respective homes. Plaintiffs' assert the County was duty bound to properly maintain, operate, and upkeep the public sanitary sewer line servicing the service station property and Plaintiff's homes, and that it breached its duty by "failing to maintain, operate, and upkeep the sanitary sewer main in such a manner as not to deliver gasoline and other toxic substances to Plaintiffs' homes, and/or in failing to destroy the offending pipes".

The public sanitary sewerage lines in question have been owned by the City of Parma for decades. On May 1, 2008, the County Sanitary Engineer, via contract, agreed to provide mainline sanitary sewer cleaning, televising, inspection and maintenance in the public right of way, and lateral sanitary sewer cleaning and inspection in the public right of way to Parma.

After answering, the County filed a Civil Rule 12(C) motion based upon the Plaintiffs' admissions that they were aware of the alleged petroleum vapor infiltration in their homes for several years prior to filing suit --- in most cases as far back as 1982 and in all cases well beyond the limitations period set forth in R.C. 2744.04. After written discovery was exchanged by the parties, the County filed a motion for summary judgment on the issue of governmental immunity, arguing that the system operated as designed at all times, and that no obstruction or other failure was present or identified. The trial court denied the County's Civil Rule 12(C)¹ and its motion for summary judgment "in part". Apx. 2. After the trial court certified that no just reason existed to delay the review of the limitation issue, the County appealed both denials pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(C). In a split decision, the Eighth District refused to review the trial court order denying the County the benefit of the limitations defense set forth in R.C. 2744.04.² The majority erroneously held that the limitations defense in R.C.2744.04 was no different than the general limitations set forth in R.C. Chapter 2305 and that R.C. 2744.04 did not provide the County with an immunity or defense subject to the interlocutory appeal provision of R. C. 2744.02. Apx. 1.

The majority's determination is clearly erroneous as it fails to implement or follow the Court's most recent instructions in *Sampson*, *Sommerville* or *Sullivan*. Further, the majority's decision disregards the analysis set forth in *Mynes*, supra, that dispenses with the need for a Civil Rule 54(B) certification in appeals brought pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(C) precisely because the

¹ The trial court granted Speedway/Marathon Oil's motion to dismiss based upon the four year statute of limitations set forth in R.C. 2305.09

² But see *Finley*, 189 Ohio App.3d 139 (2010) wherein the 8th Dist. exercised jurisdiction and determined the action based under R.C. 2744.04.

right of appeal under the statute is self-executing. Apx. 1, *Riscatti et al. v. Prime Properties Limited Partnership, et al.*, Eighth District Nos. 97270 and 97274.

The dissent correctly applied both the statute and this Court's recent decisions in determining that a final appealable order was present. See Apx. 1, Rocco, J. dissent at ¶42. At bar, no dispute exists that the County is a political subdivision entitled to the benefits of the immunities and defenses provided by the Tort Liability Act. No dispute exists that the limitations period set forth in 2744.04 is an immunity/defense expressly reserved for subdivisions in contravention of the general limitation defenses set forth in R.C. Chapter 2305. Likewise, it is equally clear that a trial court order denying a political subdivision the benefit of the 2744.04 defense denies a political subdivision the benefit of an alleged immunity from liability and is final and appealable order under R.C. 2744.02(C). This Court's pronouncement to that effect will provide much needed guidance to the bench and the bar on the issue.

This Court has long recognized that in enacting the interlocutory appeal provisions of Chapter 2744.02(C), the legislature expressly intended a broad application of the statute to effectuate the public policy behind it --- the preservation of the "fiscal integrity of political subdivisions" by allowing the courts to make liability determinations at the earliest possible opportunity. The statute is expressly designed to avoid potentially needless litigation by providing a direct right of appeal whenever a benefit of an alleged immunity from suit is denied. This Court has expressly recognized the broad application of the interlocutory appeal provisions to the denial of an alleged immunity or defense as an appropriate implementation of the Legislatures' stated goals through the early disposition of tort claims. *Sampson*, 131 Ohio St. 3d 418, 422, 423; *Summerville*, 128 Ohio St.3d 221 (2010); *Hubbell*, 115 Ohio St.3d 77 (2007). The limitations defense set forth in 2744.04 expressly limits suits against political subdivisions

and is unquestionably intended to dispose of claims at the earliest opportunity possible. When considered in light of the interlocutory appeal language in R.C. 2744.02(C), it is clear that both provisions were intended to be construed in pari materia to facilitate the direct resolution of such issues on appeal and to avoid, where possible, subjecting litigants to the substantial time and expense of a potentially unnecessary trial. The majority's refusal to exercise jurisdiction to review the trial court's denial of the benefit of R.C. 2744.04 forces the County to fully litigate the claims of one hundred plaintiffs that arose in 1982 without the benefit of the immediate review expressly provided in R.C. 2744.02(C). The decision contravenes the Legislature's stated objectives as well as the Supreme Court's implementation of the statute to review and resolve claims, such as those presented herein, at the earliest possible stage of litigation.

The jurisdiction of the intermediate appellate courts is of statewide concern. Eighty eight (88) counties, two hundred forty one (241) cities, six hundred eighty one (681) villages and one thousand three hundred eight (1308) townships benefit from the immunities and defenses set forth in the Political Subdivision Tort Liability Act. All of our citizen taxpayers benefit from the proper administration and conservation of our political subdivisions limited financial resources.

The legal issue of whether the denial of the limitations defense set forth in 2744.04 is final and appealable is not the subject of a factual dispute between the parties. It is however, a legal issue on which Ohio's appellate courts are divided. C.f. *Finley, supra*; *Sampson, supra*; *Guenther v. Springfield Twp. Trustees*, 2012 WL 175394 (2nd Dist.), citing *Makowski v. Kohler*, 2011-Ohio-2382 (9th Dist. 2011) citing *Essman v. Portsmouth*, 2009-Ohio 3367 (4th Dist. 2009) (order denying summary judgment based 2744.04 statute-of-limitation not final and appealable). Clearly, the issue of whether political subdivisions are entitled to immediately appeal an order that denies it the benefit of one of the defenses and immunities set forth in Chapter 2744

warrants a clear interpretation from the Supreme Court. Accordingly, the County respectfully asserts that the Supreme Court should exercise jurisdiction in this matter to finally resolve the issues surrounding final, appealable orders under R.C. 2744.02(C) and to determine whether R.C. 2744.04 confers a benefit of immunity upon political subdivisions. Acceptance of this appeal will promote the uniform application of the Chapter 2744 and ensure that its legislative purposes are realized.

II. STATEMENT OF THE CASE AND FACTS

A. Background Facts

On May 1, 2008 Cuyahoga County entered into an agreement with the City of Parma to provide mainline sanitary sewer cleaning and televising, maintenance of sanitary mainlines in the public rights of way, engineering plan review and approval only, and sanitary sewer lateral cleaning in the public right-of-way. On January 6, 2010 the Riscatti Plaintiffs filed their complaint alleging various torts and injuries resulting from the drainage of petroleum contaminated water into the public sanitary system that first commenced in 1982. On October 6, 2010 they filed an amended pleading naming the County as a defendant.³ After a fire in Plaintiff Riscatti's home on August 28, 2009, city investigators determined that the underground storage tanks connected to a gasoline service station leaked petroleum into the ground waters beneath the stations fuel tanks. When the ground water levels rose, contaminated ground water was discharged into the sanitary sewerage system via a drain on the service station property. As the contaminated waters flowed through the sanitary system, fumes or vapors allegedly travelled through Plaintiffs connections and into their homes. Plaintiffs' complaint admits that these

³ The Polakowski Plaintiffs named the County as a Defendant in an amended pleading filed on October 7, 2010. The torts alleged are identical to those asserted in the Riscatti Third Amended Complaint.

conditions existed since 1982 --- “especially . . . during and after rain-fall, and whenever run-off water from surface cleaning operations was sufficient to raise the water level above the drain pipes”. Importantly, the complaint admits that “[e]very day since 1982, there was a physical invasion of Plaintiffs’ properties by toxic gasoline substances” originating from the service station.

In its answer the County raised the shield of R.C. 2744 immunity. After exchanging written discovery with the Plaintiffs’ the County filed a Civil Rule 12(C) motion based upon the R.C. 2744.04 limitation defense as well as a Civil Rule 12(C)/56 motion asserting governmental immunity as a result of the gravity based design of the sanitary sewerage system --- specifically that the sanitary system properly functioned at all times and was designed to transmit/ vent sewer gases from the public system through Plaintiffs’ sanitary pipes.

B. The Trial Court Denies Defendant-Appellant Cuyahoga County The Benefit Of The Two Year Limitations Period Set Forth In R. C. 2744.04

On August 11, 2011 the trial court denied the County’s Civil Rule 12(C) motion based upon R.C. 2744.04 without elaboration.⁴ The County’s motion for summary judgment asserting immunity was denied “in part”. Apx. 2.

⁴ On the same date, the trial court dismissed defendant Speedway / Marathon Oil based upon the four (4) year statute of limitations set forth in R.C. 2305.09, holding:

“It is undisputed that Plaintiffs began smelling gasoline vapors on their properties as far back as 1982. Courts have held that noxious odors is [sic] sufficient to trigger the running of the statute of limitations on claims trespass, nuisance and negligence. See *Gibson v. Park Poultry*, 2007 WL 235859. The statute of limitation for trespass, nuisance, and negligence upon real property is four years. Plaintiffs had an affirmative duty to investigate . . . within the limitations period. Applying the limitations period . . . would necessitate that the complaint be filed no later than March 1, 2005. Plaintiffs claims are unquestionably time barred.”

Exhibit B, Trial Court Journal Entries dated 8/11/2011

C. The Eighth District refuses to exercise jurisdiction over the trial court's order denying Defendant-Appellant the benefit of R. C. 2744.04 limitations defense

On appeal, by a two to one majority, the Eighth District improperly determined that it lacked jurisdiction to review the statute of limitations issue by holding the denial did not constitute a final, appealable order and that “the facts that defendants are political subdivisions does not change the analysis.” Apx. 1, *Riscatti*, at ¶16. The majority specifically found that the trial court's order denying a demurrer based upon the 2744.04 limitations period did not deny “the benefit of alleged immunity” under 2744.02(C). *Id.* at ¶18. The dissent correctly asserted that the plain language of Chapter 2744, the Supreme Court's decisions interpreting final and appealable orders under R.C. 2744.02(C) and the District's own prior decisions expressly provided appellate jurisdiction to review the issue.

III. ARGUMENT IN SUPPORT OF PROPOSITION OF LAW

Proposition of Law I: An order that denies a political subdivision the benefit of the defense set forth in R.C. 2744.04 is a final appealable order because it denies the subdivision the benefit of an alleged immunity from liability as provided in R.C. 2744.02(C)

The Eighth District erred when it failed to exercise its subject matter jurisdiction over the trial court's order denying the County the benefit of the defense provided in R.C. 2744.04. No questions exists that the County is a political subdivision entitled to the immunities and defenses set forth in the Political Subdivision Tort Liability Act. R.C. 2744.01. R.C. 2744.02(C) plainly provides that “[a]n order that denies a political subdivision . . . the benefit of an alleged immunity from liability *as provided in this chapter or any other provision of the law* is a final order.” Emphasis added. R.C. 2744.04 is a special statute that confers a specific benefit upon

political subdivisions. It provides that an action against a political subdivision shall be brought within two years after the cause of action accrues. Its language expressly confers a clear benefit of immunity --- a shortened exposure to suit --- upon the County and all governmental defendants. Construing the plain language of R.C. 2744.02(C) in *pari materia* with R.C. 2744.04, the denial of that “benefit of immunity” is unequivocally a final and appealable order.

When the Legislature drafted 2744.02(C), it employed language expressly requiring an order denying the benefit of an alleged immunity under Chapter 2744 to constitute a final order. *Hubbell*, 115 Ohio St.3d at ¶12. Without doubt, the phrase “benefit of an alleged immunity from liability as provided in this chapter” has been interpreted by this Court to include all the benefits provided by the Tort Liability Act. Defenses under the act have been afforded the same level of protections as immunities. *Summerville v. Forest Park*, *supra*; *Sullivan v. Anderson Twp.* 122 Ohio St.3d 83; *Hubbell*, *supra*. The limitation to suit contained in 2744.04 is no different. *Finley*, 189 Ohio App.3d 139 (8th Dist. 2010). Its application properly facilitates the implementation of the overall legislative purposes of Chapter 2744 by disposing of untimely actions at the earliest possible opportunity. In fulfillment of the Legislature’s objectives, its operation conserves the time and resources of litigants. This characteristic alone makes it clear that orders denying its benefit were intended by the Legislature to be final and appealable.

Acceptance of the present appeal by the Supreme Court will resolve the divisions and differences that currently exist within the Eighth District itself and between the appellate districts. The Eighth District’s decision in *Finley*, *supra* is consistent with this Court’s decisions in *Summerville*, *Sampson and Sullivan*, *supra*. The decision below, as well as the decisions in *Guenther*, *Makowski*, and *Essman*, *supra*, are not. Accordingly, the Court’s acceptance and

determination of this appeal will greatly assist both the bench and the bar in the implementation and realization of the legislative objectives of Chapter 2744.

IV. CONCLUSION

The Eighth District majority erred in failing to exercise its jurisdiction under R.C.2744.02(C) to address the trial court's denial of a clear benefit of immunity to the County. The decision contradicts the rationale, purpose and plain language of Chapter 2744, and fails to adhere to this Court's teachings. The Court should accept jurisdiction over this appeal to further clarify the scope of jurisdiction under R.C. 2744.02(C) and to resolve the present conflicts within and between the district courts of appeal.

Respectfully submitted,

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CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

A copy of the forgoing Defendant-Appellant Cuyahoga County's Notice of Appeal and Memorandum in Support of Jurisdiction was served upon the following by regular U.S. Mail this 1st day of August, 2012.

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APPENDIX - 1

Court of Appeals of Ohio

EIGHTH APPELLATE DISTRICT
COUNTY OF CUYAHOGA

JOURNAL ENTRY AND OPINION
Nos. 97270 and 97274

ALESSANDRA RISCATTI, ET AL.

PLAINTIFFS-APPELLEES

vs.

**PRIME PROPERTIES LIMITED
PARTNERSHIP, ET AL.**

DEFENDANTS-APPELLANTS

**JUDGMENT:
AFFIRMED**

Civil Appeals from the
Cuyahoga County Common Pleas Court
Case Nos. CV-714827 and CV-735966

BEFORE: Boyle, J., Stewart, P.J., and Rocco, J.

RELEASED AND JOURNALIZED: June 28, 2012

CA 97270 CA 97274

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MARY J. BOYLE, J.:

{¶1} This court sua sponte consolidated the appeals by defendants-appellants Cuyahoga County and Northeast Ohio Regional Sewer District (“Sewer District”).¹

{¶2} Cuyahoga County and the Sewer District (collectively referred to as “defendants”) appeal from a trial court’s judgment denying their motion for judgment on the pleadings regarding their statute of limitations defense and the trial court’s judgment denying their motion for summary judgment with respect to the issue of sovereign immunity. They raise two assignments of error for our review:

“[1.] The trial court erred in denying defendants-appellants’ [Civ.R. 12] motions as the statute of limitations set forth in [R.C.] 2744.04 bars plaintiff’s [sic] claims.

“[2.] The trial court erred in denying ‘in part’ defendants-appellants’ motion for summary judgment as the appellant [sic] is immune from liability under [R.C.] 2744.02 and the appellee’s [sic] failed to meet their evidentiary burden under [Civ.R. 56].”

¹The city of Parma (“City”) has also appealed, but its appeal will remain separate and not be consolidated with the County’s and the Sewer District’s appeal. See *Riscatti v. Prime Properties*, 8th Dist. No. 97254 (the City’s appeal).

{¶3} Finding no merit to their arguments, we affirm the decision of the trial court.

Procedural History and Factual Background

{¶4} Plaintiffs-appellees are current and former residents who live or lived on State Road in Parma. On August 29, 2009, an explosion occurred in the basement of the home of plaintiffs Alessandra and Elisabetta Riscatti and Laszlo Beres (“Riscattis”). According to the complaint, “flames exploded from the sanitary sewer in the basement.” An investigation revealed that the explosion was caused by concentrated gasoline vapors that originated from drain pipes connected to underground storage tanks beneath a Marathon gas station near the Riscattis’ home. The drain pipes, built by Marathon in 1982, were connected to the sanitary sewer main and designed to keep the underground tank from floating if the ground-water table rose in response to rain or snow melt. As the water level within the cavity rose, the drain pipes flushed the excess contents of the underground storage cavity into the sanitary sewer main. Thus, groundwater contaminated with gasoline from the storage tanks would repeatedly be discharged into the sewer main, especially during heavy rains.

{¶5} The City owns the public sanitary sewer lines. But as of May 1, 2008, the County agreed to provide mainline cleaning and televising services to

the sewer lines, and to provide maintenance of the sewer lines in the public rights of way.

{¶6} The Sewer District provides sewer maintenance to various municipalities in the region, but only if the municipality contracts with the Sewer District. The Sewer District filed a motion to dismiss, asserting that the City never entered into an agreement with the Sewer District, and thus, the Sewer District never had control or maintenance responsibilities over the sewer lines in Parma.²

{¶7} Several of the plaintiffs allege that they have smelled gasoline over the years, and some claim to have smelled gasoline in their homes since 1982. Plaintiffs assert that they repeatedly complained of the smell to various entities, including the City, the Sewer District, and the County, but claim they were told that the odors in their home were not caused by gasoline from the Marathon gas station. According to plaintiffs, they were told that the odors were caused by “cooking, natural gas, or sewage gas.” Despite plaintiffs’ complaints, plaintiffs contend that the various entities “made no effort to determine whether * * * toxic substances originating from the [Marathon station] were penetrating plaintiffs’ homes.” The gas station was ordered to shut down operations on September 1, 2009, and the storage tanks were capped.

²The trial court denied the Sewer District’s motion to dismiss. The Sewer District has not raised this issue on appeal.

{¶8} Plaintiffs brought suit against the owners and operators of the Marathon gas station (including Marathon Oil Company and Prime Properties Limited Partnership), the Sewer District, the City, the County, and various other entities, alleging that “reasonable inspection would have uncovered that the sanitary sewer system was transmitting [gasoline] to dozens of private homes.” The various entities filed several motions, including motions to dismiss and/or motions for judgment on the pleading, asserting multiple defenses. Plaintiffs allege in their complaint that defendants’ failure to undertake reasonable inspection caused their damages.

{¶9} The County moved for judgment on the pleadings, claiming the statute of limitations had run. It further moved for summary judgment based on sovereign immunity. The Sewer District joined in the County’s motions. The trial court denied both of the motions. It is from these judgments that defendants appeal, claiming the trial court erred in doing so.

Statute of Limitations

{¶10} In their first assignment of error, defendants argue that the trial court erred when it denied their motion for judgment on the pleadings based on their statute of limitations defense.

{¶11} Before we review the merits of this assignment of error, however, we must first determine whether we have jurisdiction to do so. Appellate courts have jurisdiction to review the final orders of inferior courts within their

districts. Ohio Constitution, Article IV, Section 3(B)(2); R.C. 2501.02. If an order is not final and appealable, then an appellate court has no jurisdiction to review the matter and it must be dismissed. *See Gen. Acc. Ins. Co. v. Ins. Co. of N. Am.*, 44 Ohio St.3d 17, 20, 540 N.E.2d 266 (1989). In the event that the parties involved in the appeal do not raise this jurisdictional issue, an appellate court must raise it sua sponte. *See Chef Italiano Corp. v. Kent State Univ.*, 44 Ohio St.3d 86, 541 N.E.2d 64 (1989), syllabus; *Whitaker-Merrell Co. v. Geupel Constr. Co.*, 29 Ohio St.2d 184, 186, 280 N.E.2d 922 (1972).

{¶12} An appellate court has jurisdiction to review, affirm, modify, set aside, or reverse judgments or final orders. R.C. 2501.01. R.C. 2505.02(B) provides that

[a]n order is a final order that may be reviewed, affirmed, modified, or reversed, with or without retrial, when it is one of the following:

(1) An order that affects a substantial right in an action that in effect determines the action and prevents a judgment;

(2) An order that affects a substantial right made in a special proceeding or upon a summary application in an action after judgment;

(3) An order that vacates or sets aside a judgment or grants a new trial;

(4) An order that grants or denies a provisional remedy * * *;

(5) An order that determines that an action may or may not be maintained as a class action[.]

{¶13} Generally, a denial of a motion to dismiss is not a final appealable order. *Pannunizio v. Hubbard*, 11th Dist. No. 2003-T-0143, 2004-Ohio-3930, ¶ 5. That is because “the denial of a motion to dismiss does not determine the primary action or prevent a judgment.” *Huntington Natl. Bank v. Ewing Lumber Co., Inc.*, 10th Dist. No. 82AP-785, 1983 WL 3450, *1 (Apr. 5, 1983). “A motion for judgment on the pleadings is the same as a motion to dismiss filed after the pleadings are closed.” *Accelerated Sys. Integration v. Hausser & Taylor, LLP*, 8th Dist. No. 88207, 2007-Ohio-2113, ¶ 33.

{¶14} R.C. 2505.02(B)(1) is the only possibility for a final appealable order in this case, as none of the other subsections could apply. Thus, the question we must determine is whether the trial court’s denial of defendants’ motion for judgment on the pleadings based on the statute of limitations affected a substantial right of the defendants such that the denial was a final appealable order. We find that it did not.

{¶15} In addressing whether a judgment denying a motion to dismiss based on the argument that the statute of limitations had expired, the late Chief Justice Thomas J. Moyer explained (when he was a judge at the Tenth Appellate District):

The rights protected by statutes of limitations are not irreparably lost absent immediate review, but, rather, the prejudice caused by a delayed trial and stale evidence may be best assessed after a trial. Our analysis above and Ohio law supports the conclusion * * * that the statute of limitations seeks to avoid

unnecessary, prejudicial, and delayed trials, but does not accord an absolute right to be free from trial.

Prior to the adoption of the Ohio Civil Rules, it was well-settled that no final appealable order existed upon the overruling or sustaining of a demurrer to pleadings, since such an order, without more, left the action still pending in the lower court. Accordingly, *Hughes v. Everett* (App.1955), 129 N.E.2d 531, 71 Ohio Law Abs. 61, and *Trunk v. Hertz Corp.* (App.1964), 200 N.E.2d 894, 95 Ohio Law Abs. 364 [32 O.O.2d 264], held that the overruling of a demurrer based on the running of the statute of limitations was not a final appealable order.

State v. Torco Termite Pest Control, 27 Ohio App.3d 233, 235-236, 500 N.E.2d 401 (10th Dist.1985).

{¶16} In *Hughes v. Zordich*, 7th Dist. No. 99 C.A. 167, 2001 WL 1740069 (Apr. 25, 2001), the court addressed the appealability of a denial of a motion to dismiss based upon the statute of limitations. After acknowledging the constitutional limitations on the jurisdiction of appellate courts and reviewing the definition of a “final order” set forth in R.C. 2505.02(B), the court concluded that the trial court’s order did not fit into any of the categories listed in the statute: “Such a ruling does not determine the action or prevent a judgment. * * * [S]hould [the appellant] not prevail at trial, she will then have occasion to appeal that judgment.” *Id.* at *2.

{¶17} The fact that defendants are political subdivisions does not change this analysis. Although R.C. 2744.02(C) provides that an order denying “a political subdivision * * * the benefit of an alleged immunity from liability * * *

is a final order,” it says nothing about the statute of limitations defense or any other defense for that matter. In *Hubbell v. Xenia*, 115 Ohio St.3d 77, 2007-Ohio-4839, 873 N.E.2d 878, syllabus, the Ohio Supreme Court held that “[w]hen a trial court denies a motion in which a political subdivision or its employee seeks immunity under R.C. Chapter 2744, that order denies the benefit of an alleged immunity and is therefore a final, appealable order pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(C).” But an appeal from such a decision is limited to the review of alleged errors in the portion of the trial court’s decision that denied the political subdivision the benefit of immunity. See, e.g., *CAC Bldg. Properties v. Cleveland*, 8th Dist. No. 91991, 2009-Ohio-1786, ¶ 9, fn. 1; *Carter v. Complete Gen. Constr. Co.*, 10th Dist. No. 08AP-309, 2008-Ohio-6308, ¶ 8.

{¶18} Thus, we conclude that an order denying a political subdivision’s motion based on the statute of limitations defense is not an order denying that political subdivision “the benefit of alleged immunity.” See also *Essman v. Portsmouth*, 4th Dist. No. 08CA3244, 2009-Ohio-3367 (because trial court’s decision denying political subdivision’s motion based on its statute of limitations defense did not deny the political subdivision the benefit of R.C. Chapter 2744 immunity, appellate court lacked jurisdiction to consider it because it was not a final appealable order); *Guenther v. Springfield Twp. Trustees*, 2d Dist. No. 2010-CA-114, 2012-Ohio-203 (citing *Essman* for the same proposition).

{¶19} We recognize that the trial court in this case added the Civ.R. 54(B) language, “no just cause for delay,” in its judgment denying defendants’ motion for judgment on the pleadings. But “the mere addition of Civ.R. 54(B) language to what is not a final order does not transform that entry into a final appealable order.” *Sason v. Shepherd*, 11th Dist. No. 2007-L-199, 2008-Ohio-173, ¶ 3, citing *Wisintainer v. Elcen Power Strut Co.*, 67 Ohio St.3d 352, 354, 617 N.E.2d 1136 (1993) (“the phrase ‘no just reason for delay’ is not a mystical incantation which transforms a nonfinal order into a final appealable order”). Consequently, the trial court’s invocation of the Civ.R. 54(B) language does not convert the judgment into a final order.

{¶20} Accordingly, this court lacks jurisdiction to consider the trial court’s denial of defendants’ motion for judgment on the pleadings based on the statute of limitations defense. The defendants’ first assignment of error is overruled.

Summary Judgment Standard

{¶21} In their second assignment of error, defendants argue that the trial court erred when it denied their summary judgment motion based on sovereign immunity.

{¶22} An appellate court reviews a trial court’s decision on a motion for summary judgment de novo. *Grafton v. Ohio Edison Co.*, 77 Ohio St.3d 102, 105, 671 N.E.2d 241 (1996). Summary judgment is appropriate when, construing the evidence most strongly in favor of the nonmoving party (1) there

is no genuine issue of material fact, (2) the moving party is entitled to judgment as a matter of law, and (3) reasonable minds can come to but one conclusion, that conclusion being adverse to the nonmoving party. Civ.R. 56(C); *State ex rel. Duganitz v. Ohio Adult Parole Auth.*, 77 Ohio St.3d 190, 191, 672 N.E.2d 654 (1996).

{¶23} At the outset, we note that plaintiffs contend that the trial court did not rule on the County's and the Sewer District's summary judgment motion, holding it in abeyance until discovery was completed. But any order that denies a political subdivision the benefit of alleged immunity is a final appealable order, even if the order does not address the issue, as the case here. *See DiGiorgio v. Cleveland*, 196 Ohio App.3d 575, 2011-Ohio-5824, 964 N.E.2d 495; *Hubbell*, 115 Ohio St.3d 77. Accordingly, we find no procedural irregularity in addressing defendants' alleged immunity.

R.C. Chapter 2744

{¶24} The Supreme Court set forth a three-tiered analysis to determine whether a political subdivision is immune from tort liability: the first tier is to establish immunity under R.C. 2744.02(A)(1); the second tier is to analyze whether any of the exceptions to immunity under R.C. 2744.02(B) apply; if so, then under the third tier, the political subdivision has the burden of showing that one of the defenses of R.C. 2744.03 applies. *Cater v. Cleveland*, 83 Ohio St.3d 24, 28, 697 N.E.2d 610 (1998); *Hubbard v. Canton City School Bd. of Edn.*,

97 Ohio St.3d 451, 2002-Ohio-6718, 780 N.E.2d 543, ¶ 10-12. If a defense applies, then immunity is reinstated. *Id.*

{¶25} R.C. 2744.02(A)(1) provides a general grant of immunity as follows: “a political subdivision is not liable in damages in a civil action for injury, death, or loss to person or property allegedly caused by any act or omission of the political subdivision or an employee of the political subdivision in connection with a governmental or proprietary function.”

{¶26} R.C. 2744.02(B) lists five exceptions to the general immunity granted to political subdivisions under R.C. 2744.02(A)(1). *See Ryll v. Columbus Fireworks Display Co.*, 95 Ohio St.3d 467, 470, 2002-Ohio-2584, 769 N.E.2d 372, ¶ 25. The subsection pertinent to this case, R.C. 2744.02(B)(2), subjects a political subdivision to liability for “the negligent performance of acts by their employees with respect to proprietary functions of the political subdivisions.” A “proprietary function” includes “[t]he maintenance, destruction, operation, and upkeep of a sewer system.” R.C. 2744.01(G)(2)(d).

{¶27} Under R.C. 2744.02(B)(2), however, a political subdivision cannot be held liable for the negligent performance of acts by their employees with respect to a governmental function. A “governmental function” includes “[t]he provision or nonprovision, planning or design, construction or reconstruction of * * * a sewer system.” R.C. 2744.01(C)(2)(l).

{¶28} In the present case, the parties do not dispute the fact that defendants are political subdivisions and therefore entitled to the general grant of immunity under R.C. 2744.02(A)(1). Instead, the dispute centers upon whether, under the second prong of the analysis, an exception to defendants' blanket immunity applies; specifically, whether R.C. 2744.02(B)(2) applies.

{¶29} Plaintiffs argue that their claims challenge the "post-design, post-construction negligent conduct of defendants, which failed to inspect the sewer and to take steps to repair the problem [that] caused the plaintiffs' damage." Plaintiffs assert that the governmental entities "had a duty to maintain, operate, and upkeep the sanitary sewer system and or to destroy the offending drain pipes." They further allege that the governmental entities' negligent failures to inspect the sewer, combined with their failure to repair or destroy the offending drain pipes that allowed the contamination, caused the plaintiffs' injuries. Thus, plaintiffs argue that defendants were not immune from liability under R.C. 2744.02 because they negligently performed a proprietary function, specifically the maintenance of the sewer system, under R.C. 2744.02(B)(2).

{¶30} Defendants, on the other hand, argue that plaintiffs' "theory of liability — that the publicly available sanitary sewerage system vented noxious gases onto plaintiffs' property and into their homes, challenges the design, not the operation, of the system." Thus, defendants contend that they are immune from liability for acts that relate to a governmental function.

{¶31} In support of their summary judgment motion, defendants presented an affidavit of William Schneider, the County's chief sanitary engineer, who stated that the Parma sewer system was a gravity-based system. He averred that gravity-based systems are designed to facilitate the discharge of household sanitary waste into the public sanitary sewer system. Noxious sewer gases are then vented into the environment through soil stacks in each resident's home (soil stacks are vent pipes that rise through each house and extend several feet above the roof). Defendants contend that plaintiffs are claiming it is this design — this gravity-based system — that caused their injuries.

{¶32} Ohio courts have long recognized that a city can be liable for the negligent maintenance of its sewers. *See Portsmouth v. Mitchell Mfg. Co.*, 113 Ohio St. 250, 148 N.E. 846 (1925). In *Mitchell Mfg.*, the Supreme Court held "that the construction and institution of a sewer system is a governmental matter, and that there is no liability for mere failure to construct sewers. However, * * * the operation and upkeep of sewers is not a governmental function, but is a ministerial or proprietary function of the city." *Id.* at 255.

{¶33} The Supreme Court announced a similar rule in *Doud v. Cincinnati*, 152 Ohio St. 132, 137, 87 N.E.2d 243 (1949), stating:

A municipality is not obliged to construct or maintain sewers, but when it does construct or maintain them it becomes its duty to keep them in repair and free from conditions which will cause

damage to private property * * *. The municipality becomes liable for damages caused by its negligence in this regard in the same manner and to the same extent as a private person under the same circumstances.

{¶34} “Determining whether an allegation of negligence relates to the maintenance, operation, or upkeep of a sewer system or, instead, the design, construction, or reconstruction of a sewer system is not always a simple inquiry.” *Essman v. Portsmouth*, 4th Dist. No. 09CA3325, 2010-Ohio-4837, ¶ 32. A complaint is properly characterized as a maintenance, operation, or upkeep issue when “remedying the sewer problem would involve little discretion but, instead, would be a matter of routine maintenance, inspection, repair, removal of obstructions, or general repair of deterioration.” (Citations omitted.) *Id.* But a complaint presents a design or construction issue if “remedying a problem would require a [political subdivision] to, in essence, redesign or reconstruct the sewer system.” (Citations omitted.) *Id.* at ¶ 32-33.

{¶35} After reviewing the record before us, we conclude that plaintiffs’ complaint alleges the negligent performance of a proprietary function, not a governmental function. Plaintiffs allege that defendants’ failure to inspect and discover the hazardous gasoline caused their injuries. Plaintiffs are not alleging that the design of the sanitary sewer system caused their injuries. Thus, an exception to immunity applies under R.C. 2744.01(G)(2)(d) because of defendants’ alleged negligence in performing a proprietary function.

{¶36} We further conclude that genuine issues of material fact remain, including questions as to whether defendants' employees negligently failed to inspect the sanitary sewer lines, whether defendants were aware or should have been aware of the residents' complaints, and whether defendants knew or should have known of the alleged documented gasoline leaks that had occurred at the Marathon station. If so, then they had a duty to inspect the sanitary sewer lines to determine if there was an issue with gasoline being leaked from the Marathon gas station into the main sanitary sewer line. It is our view that the trial court did not err when it denied defendants' summary judgment motion based on genuine issues of material fact remaining as to whether defendants' employees negligently performed their duty to inspect.³

{¶37} Defendants argue that plaintiffs' claims fail as a matter of law because there is no evidence that the sanitary sewer system was malfunctioning in any way. But this case is not analogous to those cases cited by defendants that find the plaintiffs' complaint actually challenges the design of a sewer system, even though it purports to challenge the maintenance of it. See *Essman*, 2010-Ohio-4837, and *Zimmerman v. Summit Cty.*, 9th Dist. No. 17610, 1997 WL 22588 (Jan. 15, 1997).

³Although the Sewer District has not raised this issue as an assignment of error, we note that if the Sewer District never had control or maintenance responsibilities over Parma's sewer lines, then it should be dismissed from the case.

{¶38} In *Essman*, 2010-Ohio-4837, the homeowners alleged that the city negligently operated the sewer system by failing to monitor the water levels in the system so as to prevent sewage intrusions onto homeowners' properties. The sewer system was not designed to have water monitors. The court held that the homeowners' true complaint (the sewer system should have had water monitors) related to the original design of the sewer system, a governmental function. *Id.* at ¶ 47. The court reasoned that the city would be required to perform extensive redesigning or reconstructing of the sewer system to correct the problem. *Id.* at ¶ 46.

{¶39} In *Zimmerman*, the homeowner alleged that the county negligently maintained and operated the sewer system by dumping sewage into a stream that flowed across their property. The court disagreed with the homeowner's characterization of the issue as negligent maintenance and operation. *Id.* at *3. The court found that the county's decision to pump sewage and rain water into the stream was a response to the sewer system's inability as designed and constructed to handle the volume of materials that currently passed through it. *Id.* The court held that this was not a problem that the county could remedy through routine maintenance; rather, it would require extensive redesigning and reconstructing of the system to meet current demands. *Id.*

{¶40} In the present case, however, the sanitary sewer lines were designed to vent noxious sewer gases, not dangerous gasoline or gasoline

vapors. Gasoline entering plaintiffs' homes was not caused by defendants constructing or designing the sewer system. Further, to correct the problem, defendants would not have been required to redesign or reconstruct the sewer system. Upon inspecting the sewer lines, defendants could have easily discovered that gasoline from the storage tanks was leaking into the main sewer line, which is exactly what happened. Within just days of the explosion, the cause was determined. And within days of the explosion, the offending storage tanks were capped and the gas station ordered to shut down.

{¶41} Defendants further argue that there are no material questions of fact remaining because it was not responsible for the maintenance of the residents' private sewer lines (the sewer lines that connect from the main sewer line to each residence). If the gasoline had not been in the main lines, however, it would not have reached the plaintiffs' homes through their private sewer lines. Defendants' second assignment of error is overruled.

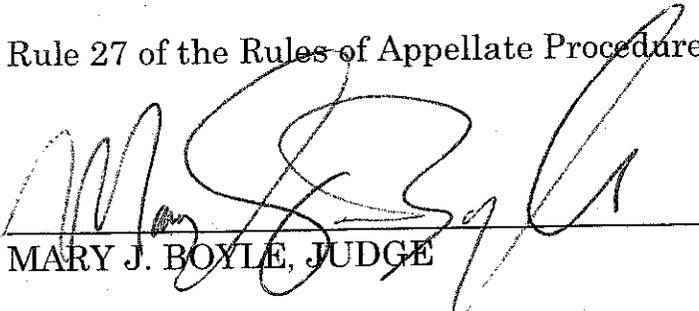
Judgment affirmed.

It is ordered that appellees recover from appellants costs herein taxed.

The court finds there were reasonable grounds for this appeal.

It is ordered that a special mandate be sent to said court to carry this judgment into execution.

A certified copy of this entry shall constitute the mandate pursuant to Rule 27 of the Rules of Appellate Procedure.



MARY J. BOYLE, JUDGE

MELODY J. STEWART, P.J., CONCURS;
KENNETH A. ROCCO, J., DISSENTS WITH SEPARATE OPINION

KENNETH A. ROCCO, J., DISSENTING:

{¶42} I respectfully dissent from the majority opinion's disposition of these appeals. In my view, the majority opinion reads both R.C. Chapter 2744 and the Ohio Supreme Court's decisions with respect to that chapter too narrowly. I believe the trial court's denial of the defendants' motion for judgment on the pleadings with respect to its statute of limitations defense constitutes a final order, because it denied the defendants "the benefit of an alleged immunity." Furthermore, I believe the trial court's decision was wrong. Consequently, I would reverse the trial court's decision on that basis and would enter judgment for the defendants on the appellees' complaints.

{¶43} I base my beliefs on the wording of the statutes and on the language the Ohio Supreme Court uses to interpret those statutes.

{¶44} R.C. 2744.02(C) states:

{¶45} “An order that denies a political subdivision or an employee of a political subdivision the *benefit of an alleged immunity from liability as provided in this chapter* or any other provision of the law is a final order.”

(Emphasis added.)

{¶46} The “chapter” includes R.C. 2744.04, which provides:

(A) An action against a political subdivision to recover damages for injury, death, or loss to person or property allegedly caused by *any act or omission in connection with a governmental or proprietary function*, whether brought as an original action, cross-claim, counterclaim, third-party claim, or claim for subrogation, *shall be brought within two years* after the cause of action accrues, or within any applicable shorter period of time for bringing the action provided by the Revised Code. The period of limitation contained in this division shall be tolled pursuant to section 2305.16 of the Revised Code. *This division applies to actions brought against political subdivisions by all persons, governmental entities, and the state.* (Emphasis added.)

The chapter also contains R.C. 2744.09, which states in pertinent part:

This chapter does not apply to, and shall not be construed to apply to, the following:

* * *

(B) Civil actions by an employee, or the collective bargaining representative of an employee, against his political subdivision relative to any matter that arises out of the employment relationship between the employee and the political subdivision.

{¶47} In *Sampson v. Cuyahoga Metro. Hous. Auth.*, 8th Dist. No. 93441, 2010-Ohio-1214, this court found no lack of jurisdiction that prevented a review.

I cannot see the distinction between a denial of immunity based upon a trial

court's decision that the "defense" contained in R.C. 2744.09 does not apply and a trial court's decision that a "defense" contained in R.C. 2744.04 does not apply. Both are decisions that deny "the benefit of an alleged immunity from liability as provided in this chapter."

{¶48} Moreover, in reviewing this court's decision in *Sampson*, the Ohio Supreme Court made no distinction between the "exceptions" and the "defenses" to immunity in considering the applicability of R.C. 2744.02(C) to the action. *Sampson*, 131 Ohio St.3d 418, 2012-Ohio-570, - N.E.2d -, ¶ 7. Without question, *Sampson* determined that a denial of immunity based upon R.C. 2744.09(B) fell within the scope of a final appealable order for purposes of immediate review. R.C. 2505.02 did not enter the analysis.

{¶49} This court previously has held that R.C. 2744.04 is a special statute that applies to tort actions brought against political subdivisions and that prevails over more general statutes of limitations. *Dominion Resource Servs. v. Cleve. Division of Water*, 8th Dist. No. 90641, 2008-Ohio-4855, ¶ 6; *Read v. Fairview Park*, 146 Ohio App.3d 15, 764 N.E.2d 1079 (8th Dist.2001); *Fifth Third Bank v. Cope*, 162 Ohio App.3d 838, 2005-Ohio-4626, 835 N.E.2d 779 (12th Dist.); see also *Summerville v. Forest Park*, 128 Ohio St.3d 221, 2010-Ohio-6280, 943 N.E.2d 522.

{¶50} Because R.C. 2744.04 is not only a special statute but also is a part of the political subdivision "chapter," I conclude that it falls within the exception

to R.C. 2505.02 that is set forth in R.C. 2744.02(C). The following language in *Summerville v. Forest Park*, 128 Ohio St.3d 221, 2010-Ohio-6280, 943 N.E.2d 522, ¶ 2 and ¶ 38-40 lends support to such a conclusion:

R.C. Chapter 2744 governs political-subdivision immunity. Pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(C), orders denying employees of a political subdivision immunity from liability *under any provision of law* are final, appealable orders. * * *

* * *

* * * The General Assembly enacted R.C. Chapter 2744, stating that “the protections afforded to political subdivisions and employees of political subdivisions by this act are urgently needed in order to ensure the continued orderly operation of local governments and the continued ability of local governments to provide public peace, health, and safety services to their residents.” Am.Sub.H.B. No. 176, Section 8, 141 Ohio Laws, Part I, 1733. We noted in *Hubbell*, 115 Ohio St.3d 77, 2007-Ohio-4839, 873 N.E.2d 878, that “[t]he manifest statutory purpose of R.C. Chapter 2744 is the preservation of the fiscal integrity of political subdivisions.” *Id.* at ¶ 23, quoting *Wilson v. Stark Cty. Dept. of Human Servs.* (1994), 70 Ohio St.3d 450, 453, 639 N.E.2d 105.

We also note that judicial economy is better served by a plain reading of R.C. 2744.02(C). *Id.* at ¶ 24. “[D]etermination of whether a political subdivision is immune from liability is usually pivotal to the ultimate outcome of a lawsuit. Early resolution of the issue of whether a political subdivision is immune from liability pursuant to R.C. Chapter 2744 is beneficial to both of the parties. If the appellate court holds that the political subdivision is immune, the litigation can come to an early end, with the same outcome that otherwise would have been reached only after trial, resulting in a savings to all parties of costs and attorney fees. Alternatively, if the appellate court holds that immunity does *not* apply, that early finding will encourage the political subdivision to settle promptly with the victim rather than pursue a lengthy trial and appeals. Under either scenario, both the plaintiff and the political subdivision may save the time, effort, and expense of a trial and

appeal, which could take years.” (Emphasis sic.) *Id.* at ¶ 25, quoting *Burger v. Cleveland Hts.* (1999), 87 Ohio St.3d 188, 199-200, 718 N.E.2d 912 (Lundberg Stratton, J., dissenting). “As the General Assembly envisioned, the determination of immunity could be made prior to investing the time, effort, and expense of the courts, attorneys, parties, and witnesses * * *.” *Id.* at ¶ 26, quoting *Burger* at 200 (Lundberg Stratton, J., dissenting).

These policy considerations apply equally whether the immunity in question is based on R.C. Chapter 2744 or another provision of the law, including federal qualified immunity. Indeed, federal courts have applied a similar rationale in holding that orders denying a public official the benefit of qualified immunity are final and appealable. See, e.g., *Mitchell v. Forsyth* (1985), 472 U.S. 511, 525-530, 105 S.Ct. 2806, 86 L.Ed.2d 411. Qualified immunity “is an *immunity from suit rather than a mere defense to liability*; * * * it is effectively lost if a case is erroneously permitted to go to trial.” (Emphasis sic.) *Id.* at 526. Qualified immunity provides immunity not only from liability but from the “consequences” of a suit, including “the general costs of subjecting officials to the risks of trial-distraction of officials from their governmental duties, inhibition of discretionary action, and deterrence of able people from public service.” *Id.*, quoting *Harlow v. Fitzgerald* (1982), 457 U.S. 800, 816, 102 S.Ct. 2727, 73 L.Ed.2d 396. Failure to give effect to the language of R.C. 2744.02(C) by barring immediate appeal of denials of qualified immunity for alleged violations of Section 1983 would defeat the purpose for which the immunity exists.

Conclusion

Pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(C), an order that denies an employee of a political subdivision immunity from liability under any provision of law is a final order. * * * (Underscoring added.)

{¶51} With the foregoing language, compare *Supportive Solutions Training Academy v. Electronic Classroom of Tomorrow*, 8th Dist. Nos. 95022 and 95287, 2012-Ohio-1185 (denial of motion simply to amend complaint to

include affirmative defense of sovereign immunity not a final order), and *Duncan v. Cuy. Community College*, 8th Dist. No. 97222, 2012-Ohio-1949 (pursuant to R.C. 2744.09(A), denial of political subdivision's motion for judgment on pleadings on plaintiff's breach of contract claim not final).

{¶52} The majority opinion relies upon *Guenther v. Springfield Twp. Trustees*, 2d Dist. No. 2010-CA-114, 2012-Ohio-203, in determining that the order in this case is not final and appealable, but *Guenther* fails to mention the Ohio Supreme Court's decisions in either *Summerville* or *Mynes v. Brooks*, 124 Ohio St.3d 83, 2009-Ohio-1971, 909 N.E.2d 511. In addition, the majority opinion's reliance upon *Essman v. Portsmouth*, 4th Dist. No. 08CA3244, 2009-Ohio-3367, is problematic because *Essman* predates *Mynes*, *Summerville*, and *Sampson*, and, too, the trial court in *Essman* made no Civ.R. 54(B) certification.

{¶53} In this case, appellees alleged in their amended complaints that defendants were negligent. According to R.C. 2744.04, therefore, appellees were required to commence their actions against the defendants within two years after their cause of action "accrued." Because they did not, I believe the trial court erred in denying the defendants' motion for judgment in their favor on the pleadings.

{¶54} According to the amended complaints, offensive odors caused by gasoline leaking from the "Tank System" into the State Road sewer line began to enter appellees' homes through their connections to that line in 1982. Parma

did nothing at that time; the city only “repeatedly” assured them that the smells they experienced “were *not* caused by the Tank System,” and “repeatedly advised [them] the gasoline odor came from other sources.” Subsequently, appellees complained to the other defendants as well, but received the same answers Parma gave them.

{¶55} Appellees sought in this way to plead that all the defendants’ negligence, i.e., their failure to “maintain” the State Road sewer line, was not fixed in time, but, rather, constituted a “continuing tort,” as considered in *Sexton v. Mason*, 117 Ohio St.3d 275, 2008-Ohio-858, 883 N.E.2d 1013. Appellees’ effort, however, contorted the applicable analysis.

{¶56} In *Sexton*, the Ohio Supreme Court did not consider the tort of negligence; rather, the court distinguished between a continuing *trespass* and a completed *trespass*, stating as follows:

The defendant’s *ongoing conduct or retention of control* is the key to distinguishing a *continuing trespass* from a permanent trespass. We hold that a continuing trespass in this context occurs when there is some continuing or ongoing allegedly tortious *activity* attributable to the defendant. A *permanent* trespass occurs when the defendant’s allegedly tortious *act* has been *fully accomplished*. (Emphasis added.)

{¶57} The court in *Sexton* noted that a trespass “typically occurs when a defendant *enters* another person’s land * * * .” (Emphasis added.) The *Sexton* court reasoned that a “continuing trespass” thus exists when “force” is “continued by the act” of the “defendant actor.” This reasoning is in conformity

with the common law definition of a “trespass” as being an “invasion.” *Black’s Law Dictionary* (4th Ed.1951).

{¶58} A continuing trespass thus “occurs when there is some continuing or ongoing tortious *activity* attributable to the defendant.” *Id.* “Conversely, a permanent trespass occurs when the defendant’s tortious *act* has been *fully accomplished*. * * * Thus, the determinative question centers upon the *nature of the defendant’s tortious conduct, not upon the nature of the damage caused by that conduct.*” *Id.* (Emphasis added.) The *Sexton* court quoted the following as the applicable analysis:

A trespass under Ohio law is a continuing trespass only if *the trespass itself, and not the ongoing injury or harm caused by a past, completed misdeed, is continuing. Ongoing conduct is the key to a continuing trespass. Id., citing Sexton v. Mason* (12th Dist. No. CA2006-02-026), 2007-Ohio-38, at ¶ 17.

{¶59} Because this language focuses on the nature of the tortious conduct and the conduct at issue constituted a trespass, the court contemplated continuing action, not inaction. Proceeding with the foregoing foundation for its decision, *Sexton* held that a “discovery rule” applied with respect to damage to property from a trespass. *Id., citing Harris v. Liston*, 86 Ohio St.3d 203, 714 N.E.2d 377 (1999). Thus, allegations in a complaint that allege continuing damage are insufficient. The complaint must “allege continuing activity” by the defendant. *Sexton; compare State ex rel. Doner v. Doty*, 130 Ohio St.3d 446, 2011-Ohio-6117, 958 N.E.2d 1235.

{¶60} In this case, appellees alleged that toxic substances began entering their homes from the "Tank System" in 1982. The complaint stated that appellees noticed the gasoline smells at that time. The "trespass" onto their properties, therefore, had commenced. The gasoline originated from the gas station's pipes, over which the defendants had no control, and entered the pipes of appellees' homes, over which the defendants had no control. Once the defendants *declined* to address the alleged problem, appellees' cause of action against them had accrued. *See, e.g., Luthy v. Dover*, 5th Dist. No. 2011AP030011, 2011-Ohio-4604, ¶ 22 (respondeat superior claim against city barred by application of R.C. 2744.04 because homeowners' cause of action accrued when basement flooded; theory of "permanent trespass" rejected).

{¶61} Under these circumstances, if, as appellees argued, R.C. 2744.01(G)(2)(d) applied and created an exception to the defendants' immunity pursuant to R.C. 2744.02(B)(2), the defendants' liability for *negligence* thus occurred as early as 1982; appellees were put on notice at that time that none of the defendants was willing to "maintain" the State Road sewer lines to address the offensive smells. *Bauer v. Brunswick*, 9th Dist. No. 11CA0003-M, 2011-Ohio-4877, ¶ 14; *Luthy*. In other words, R.C. 2744.04 was triggered. The trespass of the gasoline, originating from the "Tank System," apparently continued.

{¶62} In an effort to overcome the application of R.C. 2744.04 to their claim against the political subdivisions, appellees therefore conflated the two separate torts of negligence and trespass. Assuming that the defendants had a duty to investigate the source of the smells, once they declined to do so, the tort they committed as appellees alleged in their complaints, i.e., negligence, was complete. *See Essman*, 4th Dist. No. 09CA3325, 2010-Ohio-4837. Continuing to advise appellees that the gasoline odors did not come through the sewer lines neither constituted a “trespass” as that word is defined in law, nor constituted an “activity” that protected appellees from application of the discovery rule. *State ex rel. Stamper v. Richmond Hts.*, 8th Dist. No. 94721, 2011-Ohio-4877.

{¶63} As of the first date that defendants declined to take action, their negligence accrued. Appellees were on notice to take the initiative themselves to discover the source of the trespass. *Bauer*, 9th Dist. No. 11CA0003-M, 2011-Ohio-4877; *see also Luthy*, 5th Dist. No. 2011AP030011, 2011-Ohio-4604, ¶ 22-24. Appellees could have hired, and, indeed, they would have been prudent to hire, a plumbing company, or contacted the Ohio Environmental Protection Agency, to ascertain whether their sewer lines contained gasoline.

{¶64} According to the complaints, therefore, the defendants’ inaction, which dated more than two years before the explosion, may have been negligent, but it did not constitute a “continuing violation” for purposes of

evading the application of R.C. 2744.04. *Stamper*, ¶ 27, citing *State ex rel. Nickoli v. Erie MetroParks*, 124 Ohio St.3d 449, 2010-Ohio-606, 923 N.E.2d 588; *Luthy*.⁴ Consequently, I believe the trial court erred in denying the defendants' Civ.R. 12(C) motion for judgment on the pleadings.⁵

{¶65} Based upon my analysis, I would sustain the defendants' first assignment of error, thus rendering their second assignment of error moot. App.R. 12(A)(1)(c). I would reverse the trial court order that denied the defendants' motion for judgment on the pleadings based upon R.C. 2744.04, and would enter judgment for the defendants on appellees' complaints.

⁴No better example of the "continuing violation" doctrine exists in this case, however, but the ongoing negligent failure of the owner-operator of the "Tank System" to inspect and replace the faulty gasoline tanks.

⁵In so stating, I must disagree with the reasoning set forth by the court in *Coleman v. Portage Cty. Engineer*, 191 Ohio App.3d 32, 2010-Ohio-6255, 944 N.E.2d 756, ¶ 63 (11th Dist). The *Coleman* court based its analysis on two other decisions that considered the "continuing violation doctrine," viz., *Kuhnle Bros., Inc. v. Geauga*, 103 F.3d 516 (6th Cir.1997) and *Painesville Mini Storage, Inc. v. Painesville*, 11th Dist. No. 2008-L-092, 2009-Ohio-3656.

However, the *Coleman* court misapplied those cases. In *Kuhnle Bros.*, the county had passed legislation that affected the plaintiffs on a continuing basis, while in *Painesville Mini Storage*, the court rejected the plaintiffs' claim of "continuing violation." The *Coleman* court also failed to consider when the plaintiffs first were aware of the underlying injury so as to apply R.C. 2744.04, or whether the underlying injury had been caused by the political subdivision's continuing actions rather than its inaction. Moreover, *Coleman* failed to analyze the situation presented in light of *Nicholl* and *Sexton*.

APPENDIX - 2



69720890

IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO

ALESSANDRA RISCATTI ETAL
Plaintiff

Case No: CV-10-714827

Judge: LANCE T MASON

PRIME PROPERTIES LIMITED PARTNERSHIP ETAL
Defendant

JOURNAL ENTRY

DEFT CUYAHOGA COUNTY'S MTNS PURSUANT TO O.R.C. P. 12(C) AND / OR O.R.C. P. 56 ON THE ISSUES OF IMMUNITY AND CAUSATION MICHAEL A DOLAN (0051848), FILED 05/31/2011, IS DENIED IN PART. DEFENDANT CUYAHOGA COUNTY'S MOTION TO DISMISS PURSUANT TO CIVIL RULE 12(C) IS DENIED. THE COURT SHALL HOLD IT RULING AS TO DEFENDANT'S MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT IN ABEYANCE UNTIL THE CLOSE OF DISCOVERY. AT THAT TIME DEFENDANT SHALL BE PERMITTED TO RENEW ITS MOTION FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT.

PLAINTIFF(S) ALESSANDRA RISCATTI(P1), ELISABETTA RISCATTI(P2), LASZLO BERES(P3), STEVEN CSOLLAK(P4), HELEN CSOLLAK(P5), JOHN DESSOFFY(P6), PHILOMENA DESSOFFY(P7), MARGARITA HARSOULAS(P8), PAUL HOFFMAN(P9), GAE HOFFMAN(P10), RICHARD KINZEL(P11), WENDY KINZEL(P12), DANIEL KINZEL(P13), TIMOTHY KINZEL(P14), TIMOTHY PODANY(P15), DANIEL PODNAY(P16), BENJAMIN PODANY(P17), ANDREW KINZEL(P18), WILLIAM KINZEL(P19), LAURA O'NEILL(P20), RALPH SCHILLO(P21), LAURA SCHILLO(P22), MIKE STANACZYK(P23), LINDA STANACZYK(P24), ROBERT STANACZYK(P25), KATHERINE STANACZYK(P26), CHARLES WHITE(P27), FRANCES WHITE(P28), EARNEST GALES(P29), JACQUELINE GALES(P30), ILEEN GALES(P31), MARIO TOMMASINI(P32), SHARON TOMMASINI(P33), SCOTT WILSON(P34) and CRYSTAL WILSON(P35) MOTION FOR LEAVE TO PLEAD TO RESPOND TO CUYAHOGA COUNTY'S MOTION FOR JUDGMENT ON THE PLEADINGS OR FOR SUMMARY JUDGMENT DREW LEGANDO 0084209, FILED 06/30/2011, IS GRANTED.

DEFT CITY OF PARMA'S MTN FOR JUDGMENT ON THE PLEADINGS MICHAEL P MALONEY (0038661), FILED 05/03/2011, IS DENIED.

D19 CITY OF PARMA SECOND MOTION FOR JUDGMENT ON THE PLEADINGS MICHAEL P MALONEY 0038661, FILED 06/30/2011, IS DENIED.

PLTFS MTN FOR ADMISSION PRO HAC VICE OF STEPHANIE N. BROOKS DREW LEGANDO (0084209), FILED 08/19/2010, IS GRANTED.

PLTFS MTN FOR ADMISSION PRO HAC VICE OF ALLEN M. STEWART DREW LEGANDO (0084209), FILED 08/19/2010, IS GRANTED.

PLTFS MTN FOR ADMISSION PRO HAC VICE OF STEVEN BAUGHMAN JENSEN DREW LEGANDO (0084209), FILED 08/19/2010, IS GRANTED.

P1 ALESSANDRA RISCATTI MOTION FOR ADMISSION PRO HAC VICE OF CHRIS NIDEL..... DREW LEGANDO 0084209, FILED 11/16/2010, IS GRANTED.

D10 NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT MTN TO DISMISS PLTFS' THIRD AMENDED COMPLAINT BY DEFT NORTHEAST OHIO REGIONAL SEWER DISTRICT JULIE A BLAIR 0077696, FILED 10/12/2010, IS DENIED.

D20 CUYAHOGA COUNTY OHIO MOTION TO DISMISS..... MICHAEL A DOLAN 0051848, FILED 05/05/2011, IS DENIED.

Judge Signature

08/10/2011

08/04/2011

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IN THE COURT OF COMMON PLEAS CUYAHOGA COUNTY, OHIO

ALESSANDRA RISCATTI ETAL
Plaintiff

Case No: CV-10-714827

Judge: LANCE T MASON

PRIME PROPERTIES LIMITED PARTNERSHIP ETAL
Defendant

JOURNAL ENTRY

89 DIS. W/ PREJ - PARTIAL

SPEEDWAY SUPERAMERICA, LLC(D6) AND MARATHON OIL COMPANY(D8) MTN TO DISMISS THIRD AMENDED COMPLAINT AGAINST DEFTS SPEEDWAY SUPERAMERICA LLC AND MARATHON OIL COMPANY ROBERT B CASARONA 0036715, FILED 10/22/2010, IS GRANTED. DEFENDANTS SPEEDWAY SUPERAMERICA LLC AND MARATHON OIL COMPANY'S MOTION TO DISMISS THIRD AMENDED COMPLAINT IS GRANTED AS THE PLAINTIFFS HAVE FAILED TO ALLEGE ANY PLAUSIBLE CLAIMS FOR RELIEF AGAINST THE MOVING DEFENDANTS. A PLAUSIBLE CLAIM FOR RELIEF IS ONE WHERE THE PLAINTIFF PLEADS FACTUAL CONTENT THAT ALLOWS THE COURT TO DRAW REASONABLE INFERENCE THAT THE DEFENDANT IS LIABLE FOR THE MISCONDUCT ALLEGED. ASHCROFT V. IQBAL (2009), 129 S.CT. 1937. A PLAINTIFF MUST PROVIDE THE GROUNDS OF HIS ENTITLEMENT TO RELIEF THROUGH MORE THAN LABELS AND CONCLUSIONS. BELL ATLANTIC CORP. V. TWOMBLY (2007) 550 U.S. 544. THE COURT FINDS THAT THE PLAINTIFF HAVE NOT ADEQUATELY PLED THAT ANY ACTIONS OF THE MOVING DEFENDANTS PROXIMATELY CAUSED ANY INJURY. IN THIS CASE THE PLAINTIFFS HAVE FAILED TO IDENTIFY ANY DIRECT CAUSAL LINK BETWEEN ANY ALLEGED INJURIES AND THE CONDUCT OF EITHER OF THE MOVING DEFENDANTS THAT COULD HAVE TAKEN PLACE BETWEEN AUGUST 1982, WHEN DEFENDANT MOVING DEFENDANTS EXCAVATED THE OLD STORAGE TANK AND INSTALLED A NEW TANK, AND MARCH 1, 2001, THE LAST DATE MOVING DEFENDANTS HAD OWNERSHIP/CONTROL OF THE STATION PROPERTY OR THE TANK SYSTEM.

THE COURT FINDS THAT THE COMPLAINT FURTHER FAILS TO STATE A CLAIM FOR MEDICAL MONITORING DAMAGES AS PLAINTIFFS' COMPLAINT MAKES NO ALLEGATIONS OF A SPECIFIED PRESENT PHYSICAL INJURY SUFFERED BY ANY PARTICULAR PLAINTIFF.

MOREOVER PLAINTIFFS' CLAIMS AS TO MOVING DEFENDANTS ARE BARRED BY THE STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS. ANY ALLEGED TORTIOUS CONDUCT BY THE MOVING DEFENDANTS WOULD HAVE NECESSARILY TAKEN PLACE NO LESS THAN EIGHT YEARS BEFORE PLAINTIFFS' COMPLAINT HAD BEEN FILED. IT IS UNDISPUTED THAT PLAINTIFFS BEGAN SMELLING GASOLINE VAPORS ON THEIR PROPERTIES AS FAR BACK AS 1982. COURTS HAVE HELD THAT NOXIOUS ODORS IS SUFFICIENT TO TRIGGER THE RUNNING OF STATUTE OF LIMITATIONS ON CLAIMS OF TRESPASS, NUISANCE AND NEGLIGENCE. SEE GIBSON V. PARK POULTRY, 2007 WL 235859. THE STATUTE OF LIMITATION FOR TRESPASS, NUISANCE, AND NEGLIGENCE UPON REAL PROPERTY IS FOUR YEARS. PLAINTIFFS HAD AN AFFIRMATIVE DUTY TO INVESTIGATE TO USE DILIGENCE IN DISCOVERING THEIR CAUSE OF ACTION WITHIN THE LIMITATION PERIOD. APPLYING THE LIMITATION PERIOD TO THE LAST DAY MOVING DEFENDANTS EXERCISED CONTROL OVER THE STATION AND TANKS WOULD NECESSITATE THE COMPLAINT BE FILED NO LATER THAN MARCH 1, 2005. PLAINTIFFS' CLAIMS ARE UNQUESTIONABLY TIME BARRED.

PLAINTIFFS' COMPLAINT FOR BODILY INJURIES LIKEWISE ARE TIME BARRED AS CLAIMS FOR BODILY INJURIES SHALL BE BROUGHT WITHIN TWO YEARS AFTER THE CAUSE OF ACTION ACCRUES. THE LATEST DATE THE PLAINTIFFS' COULD HAVE BROUGHT SUIT FOR BODILY INJURY AS TO MOVING DEFENDANTS WOULD HAVE BEEN MARCH 1, 2003.

PLAINTIFFS' CLAIMS FOR ABSOLUTE NUISANCE AND STRICT LIABILITY FAIL AS THIS COURT DOES NOT FIND THAT THE OPERATION OF A GAS STATION AND STORAGE OF GASOLINE IN AN UNDERGROUND STORAGE TANK ARE ABNORMALLY DANGEROUS ACTIVITIES.

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PLAINTIFFS' CLAIM FOR RECKLESS, WANTON CONDUCT, OR MALICE IS NOT LEGALLY COGNIZABLE UNDER OHIO LAW AS A SEPARATE CAUSE OF ACTION. THEREFORE DISMISSAL IS APPROPRIATE AS TO THIS COUNT. THIS COURT THEREFORE GRANTS MOVING DEFENDANT'S MOTION TO DISMISS COUNTS ONE, TWO, THREE, FOUR, AND FIVE OF PLAINTIFF'S THIRD AMENDED COMPLAINT WITH PREJUDICE. PARTIAL.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dance H. [unclear]". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Judge Signature

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