

Manheim authority addresses billing error

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The Manheim Borough Authority approved a 2012 budget on Thursday that includes a 20 percent water rate increase and billing changes.

The new rate will increase the fee from \$4.43 to \$5.35 per 1,000 gallons.

Borough authority administrator and operations manager Dave Fenicle said Friday that while water rates are on the rise, there will be no increase to sewer rates.

Sewer usage rates are based on water usage. The authority charges all users a minimum fee, plus imposes an additional fee for usage above the minimum.

The authority currently charges a minimum of \$151 per quarter for 8,000 gallons.

However, billing for both water and sewer, now done quarterly, will shift to monthly. Monthly billing is possible with the new, technologically-advanced water meters that were recently installed.

The new monthly billing will feature a sewer base rate of 2,000 gallons per month with a rate of \$49.67 per month. That will actually save customers about \$2 per quarter.

"We want to ease the overall cost for people and make it more manageable," Fenicle said. "A quarterly bill can be a big amount for some people — monthly billing will help people's monthly budgeting. If they have a leak, it may be more immediately detected, and since it's more immediate, it may help to pinpoint any conservation measures they may need to make."

These changes will affect about 2,300 homes and businesses in the borough as well as parts of Penn and Rapho townships served by the authority.

Fenicle said the monthly billing process will begin in January. While some customers may receive prorated bills, the conversion to the monthly billing cycle is expected to be done by Feb. 1.

Fenicle said that five years ago the authority predicted a 100 percent increase over a five-year period for both water and sewer. He explained that the increased sewer rates were intended to fund an \$11 million upgrade to the wastewater treatment plant to meet the new Chesapeake Bay standards. Water rates were expected to increase due to capital upgrades at the water plant that were completed in 2001.

Instead, sewer rates have increased only 70 percent in the past five years, and Fenicle anticipates that going forward rates may not reach 100 percent. Water rates have increased 65 percent in the past five years.

"Looking beyond 2012, we feel that both water and sewer rates may only need to be adjusted to reflect any increase in operating expense," he said.

For the past 12 years, the authority had been contracting services from Miller Environmental in Reading. On Jan. 1, the authority will begin operating both the water and wastewater treatment systems itself.

The move not only means new jobs in the community, but it also will help the authority trim costs. Fenicle said that the cost reductions as well as efficiencies made to the plants have contributed to rates for both water and sewer not reaching the 100 percent predicted increase.

Another change the authority will make in 2012 includes relocation. The authority will be moving its offices from the borough office building at 15 E. High St, to 18 E. High St. in January. It will occupy the new office Jan. 9.

Read more: http://lancasteronline.com/article/local/553252_Manheim-authority-raises-water-rate-.html#ixzz1yO18nxz7