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Water/sewer rates could be on the rise

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ROOSEVELT — Borough residents may have to pay higher water and sewer bills next year.

Last year, the Borough Council passed an ordinance that set new water rates based on consumption for 2006. Currently, residents pay bimonthly rates starting at \$298 per family dwelling or house of worship, \$438 per commercial establishment and \$360 per farm where water is used by livestock. The council discussed increasing the rates again at its Dec. 4 workshop meeting.

Chief Financial Officer George Lange said changing to consumption-based billing this year has resulted in “after-the-fact” billing. He explained that since the first water/sewer bills under the new billing system were sent out in March, there were only five instead of six monthly billing periods this year.

There will be six billing periods in 2007, according to Lange.

As a result of only having five billing periods in 2006, Lange said the Borough Council will have to pass an emergency resolution for approximately \$30,000 at its next regular meeting. The resolution, he said, would allow the borough to close out its water/sewer budget for this year.

“It adds to the budget this year,” Lange said, “but automatically becomes part of next year’s budget.”

Lange said the council has no choice but to pass the resolution.

“The water and sewer plants have to keep operating,” he said.

The total water/sewer billing for the borough in 2006 amounted to \$97,000. While this year the borough collected some money it was due the previous year, the budget overall ran at a shortfall, according to Lange.

Councilman Michael Hamilton said the shortfall must be raised in next year’s budget through rates. He compared the \$30,000 the borough owes this year to paying off a credit card.

Hamilton said the borough should hold a meeting by the end of the year to examine the rate structure of water and sewer bills, and to make sure the borough is collecting enough to meet its needs.

When Councilwoman Pat Moser asked Lange if he knew how much water/sewer bills would need to increase, he said he would not like to say anything before reviewing the issue.

Hamilton said borough officials would have to look at spreadsheets and usage figures.

“It’s always tricky,” Hamilton said. “We don’t want to make it tough on people with a fixed income.”

Moser said there are families in town with a lot of children, which means plenty of baths and showers. She said some families may not have that much money.

According to Lange, consumption-based billing did not generate a lot of excess billing this year.

According to Bob Silverstein, the utilities chairman, water/sewer operator Toby Moore reported that six of the 300 new water meters installed for the new billing had to be replaced due to installation faults. Another 20 meters were returned for faulty radio signals that generated higher than normal readings, Silverstein said.

The meters, which are 3 years old, have 10-year warranties and can be exchanged for other meters, according to Silverstein.

Silverstein also reported that recent fire hydrant testing throughout the borough showed that all hydrants have plenty of pressure. According to Silverstein, Moore has recommended replacing two of the hydrants that were difficult to open.