

Water bills going up '44 to 100%'

By TOM LONERGAN

A 1917 Michigan law may allow Detroit to increase substantially the water rates paid by some suburban customers.

While the Detroit Water and Sewer Department (DWSD) last week announced a proposed 45 percent system-wide hike in water rates, Oakland

County Drain Commissioner George Kuhn said the increase — due to take effect Dec. 1 — could be much higher for some suburban communities.

"WE THINK it's like 44 to 100 percent," Kuhn said Friday at a meeting of local public works department officials. "But we're not privy to the detailed information."

DWSD sells water wholesale to nearly 100 community water customers in six counties, including Oakland, Wayne and Macomb. The water rates vary by city and township.

The proposed water rate increase would be the second since 1976. There have been four sewer rate increases since July 1977. Both water and sewer rates are used to determine a homeowner's quarterly water bill.

THE 1917 STATE law allows a city water authority to charge customers outside its territorial limits "not less than nor more than double that paid by consumers within their own territory."

The law further states a municipal water corporation may charge neighboring cities, villages and townships more than double what its own residents pay provided the customer cities are outside the municipality's county and more than 10 miles from the water utility's "territorial limits."

Kuhn fears that DWSD may charge some suburban cities up to double the new rate charged to Detroit residents.

At the request of John Lamerato, Oakland County's representative on the seven-member Detroit Board of Water Commissioners, a report outlining the proposed rate increases was not distributed last week to municipal customers or the news media.

The water board is expected to discuss the issue at a special 2:30 p.m. meeting today at the Water Board building in downtown Detroit.

THE RATE increases are proposed in a report prepared by Camp, Dresser & McKee of Detroit, DWSD's rate consultant. The firm did a year-long study of Detroit water rates.

Asked if county officials weren't simply assuming some suburban water rates may be double Detroit's, Donald Ringer, the county's public works manager, said: "If they go ahead the way they've been discussing it, that's a relative certainty."

A spokesperson for DWSD said Friday the department does not have a breakdown of rates for individual suburban customers. She said a "system-wide average" rate increase of 45 percent is proposed.

IN 1976, water rates were increased 39 percent. That increase was chal-

lenged in court by several suburban communities. The suit is still pending final arguments and a decision.

According to DWSD, the higher rates are necessary to meet inflation and increased chemical and labor costs. A portion of the new revenues will be used to upgrade old water mains in Detroit and older suburbs, the spokesperson said.

Kuhn objected to use of new water revenues to improve Detroit's Waterworks Plant on Jefferson Avenue.

"Why are we (the suburbs) brought in to upgrade that plant when it's an in-house plant?" said Kuhn.

The DWSD spokesperson said the new water revenues "are not earmarked for Waterworks Park" but could be used there. She said DWSD hopes to sell bonds later this month to finance improvements.

IN A RELATED issue, U.S. District Judge John Feikens is expected to rule June 30 whether Kuhn can delay implementation of new sewage treatment deadlines at the Detroit sewage plant.

Earlier this year, city, state, federal officials and Feikens revised 1977 consent judgment deadlines which Detroit must meet to comply with the federal Clean Water Act. A consent judgment deadline was missed last December.

Kuhn, who is an intervenor in the federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) suit against the sewage plant, has refused to sign the revised order until a review committee is established to oversee DWSD's budgeting process.

Feikens, who has presided over the sewage treatment plant case, has "backed off" his January proposal for such a committee, according to William Hampton of Farmington Hills. Hampton is Oakland County's lawyer in the case.

Kuhn represents Oakland County as a party in the suit. Hampton said it is not known whether the three-year-old consent judgment can be amended without Kuhn's signature.

Kuhn says the revised consent judgment would reduce Detroit's requirement to treat more than one billion gallons of sewage a day, according to EPA guidelines, to 805 million gallons a day.

The treatment plant now meets about half the EPA requirement.

OCC holds tuition line, but how long?

By TIM RICHARD

"I have to boast a little. We have a balanced budget this year without an increase in tuition," President Robert F. Roelofs told the Oakland Community College Board of Trustees last week.

"But it might be the last year we're able to say this," Roelofs added.

OCC's tuition for resident students will stand at \$15.50 per credit hour for the fall semester and probably for winter, the same as it was in the 1979-80 school year.

"Through good fortune or good management — I don't know which — we managed to keep it there, even after reductions in state aid. We're almost alone in the state in not raising tuition," Roelofs added.

The two-year college has 20,000 students on four campuses and an operating budget of \$27 million.

"MOST UNIVERSITIES and colleges have had to raise tuition, and some substantially," he said. Roelofs cited Mott Community College, Flint, \$22; Delta, near Bay City, \$19.50; Grand Rapids, \$19; and Jackson, \$23.

"Others are considering charging for 'contact' hours above credit hours," he said. An English course and a chemistry course may both be worth three credit hours, for example, but the chemistry student might put in three laboratory hours as well as three classroom hours, so the chemistry course would be worth six hours of faculty "contact".

One way of holding down costs, Roelofs said, was to "improve the student-faculty ratio," he said.

"This does not mean packing classes. It's done by eliminating low-enrollment classes — where enrollment is lower than 15 students."

HE SAID the college has further held down costs by not replacing two administrators and several faculty members.

"We're waiting to see what will happen with Tisch," he said, referring to the Shiawassee drain commissioner's proposal to cut property taxes statewide by half. Tisch is seeking signatures to put his controversial proposal on the ballot.

Board Vice-chairman Earl Anderson cautioned OCC administrators about public reaction against community colleges because of the audit scandal at Wayne County Community College and the firing of its president.

"This damn WC3 thing has got me upset and nervous. All of us have got to be extra careful," said Anderson.

"Good advice," agreed Roelofs. "Once the sharks get out, they're liable to bite anybody."

ROELOFS SAID OCC was complemented during an accreditation visit from the National Association of Clinical Laboratory Scientists.

"They were complimentary and had only few things to suggest. They said that if we got more than 40 students, we should add more faculty. We had already planned on that."

"They suggested more released time for faculty coordination. I'm not sure I'd go along with that. But they were not insisting."

In pursuing the goal of broadening faculty experience, Roelofs said OCC is working toward a faculty exchange with the University of Michigan-Dearborn. Several OCC faculty members were being interviewed at UM-D last week to see if an exchange could be worked out, he said.



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