

Water rates in Hills could be dropping

By Joanne Malluszewski
staff writer

Whether Farmington Hills water and sewer consumers will have smaller bills to look forward to in 1987 is still speculative.

The Detroit Water and Sewerage Department, which provides water and sewage treatment for most Oakland County suburbs, including Farmington Hills and Farmington, has proposed new rates that, if ap-

proved, would take effect July 1. Under Detroit's proposed rates — based on a formula that grew out of a 6-year-old lawsuit between Detroit and the suburbs — sewage rates for all suburbs and water rates for about half of the Detroit area suburbs are expected to be reduced.

A public hearing before the Detroit Board of Water Commissioners for local communities to comment on proposed rate changes is sched-

uled for 9:30 a.m., Tuesday, Jan. 21, at the Water Board Building in Detroit.

If approved by the Detroit Water and Sewerage Department and Detroit City Council, Farmington Hills' water and sewer rates would be reduced. As proposed, the wholesale water rate would drop from last year's \$8.25 per 1,000 cubic feet to \$7.75. Sewage rates would also be reduced from \$4.25 to \$3.98 per 1,000

cubic feet, said Dale Countegan, assistant to the director of Farmington Hills Department of Public Services.

THOUGH THESE rates are considered wholesale rates, Farmington Hills passes its costs along to the consumer. But that doesn't mean Hills water and sewer consumers will pay the exact rate proposed by Detroit.

Because Oakland County acts as the city's agent for purchasing water and sewage treatment from Detroit, the county is expected to tack on an operations and maintenance fee. In the past, the county has generally charged an additional \$1.25 per 1,000 cubic feet, Countegan said.

"So they (proposed water and sewer rates) are going to be higher (than those proposed by Detroit)," he added.

When Detroit officials act on the proposed rates, Farmington Hills officials will be faced with determining whether to completely pass the savings on to consumers or withhold all or part of the savings in light of the need to begin financing the Evergreen-Farmington sewage system improvements.

"That's something we are going to have to take a look at," Countegan said.

Long-planned improvements to

the deteriorating Evergreen-Farmington sewage system are a top priority for federal financing. But even with a 55 percent matching grant available under the federal Clean Water Act, Farmington Hills is expected to pay its local share of the \$44 million in improvements.

OF THE total \$44 million project, the federal Environmental Protection Agency would pay about \$12 million. Southfield and Farmington Hills — the two suburbs that will receive the greatest benefit from improvements — will pay the remaining costs.

The EPA's interest in the project and willingness to provide 55 percent in matching grants has been sparked by environmental damage caused to the Rouge River by overflowing sewage.

Evergreen-Farmington improvements will be constructed in two segments. The first is predominately in Farmington Hills. For this segment, the local share is \$12.3 million with Farmington Hills paying \$7.7 million and Southfield, \$4.5 million. For the second \$10 million segment, Farmington Hills will pay \$2.3 million and Southfield, \$7.7 million.

Though some money has been saved to help pay the city's share, city officials are still uncertain of

how to pay for the rest.

AT A study session in November, city council members and administrators discussed the possibility of increasing consumer sewer charges and tap fees to help pay the city's bill.

City officials are considering a study of the whole water and sewage system, including whether the city should take responsibility of the system from Oakland County, Countegan said.

Rates would also be studied to determine whether — to help pay for Evergreen-Farmington improvements — the sewage and tap fees should be increased. The city can either pass along savings from reduced wholesale rates or keep it and begin building a "nest egg" to pay for major improvements, Countegan said.

"The study hasn't been started yet," he added.



E-9-1-1 is a step closer

Farmington has taken the first step toward making the E-9-1-1 emergency program a reality.

The city council voted unanimously Jan. 5 to spend \$28,830 from next year's fiscal budget to buy hardware that will hook the city into the countywide program. The city also plans to pay about \$2,853 in annual maintenance costs for the equipment.

The E-9-1-1 system is a computerized system that will replace local emergency phone numbers throughout Oakland County by allowing residents to dial "E-9-1-1" for both police and fire emergencies. The system will direct a call to the proper

emergency department and give dispatchers information about the calling location.

The approved price, through Michigan Bell Communications, will include one answering station video terminal and needed equipment to allow transfers between the city and the Michigan Bell data base, according to Director of Public Safety Frank Lauboff.

Originally estimated to cost between \$7,000 and \$10,000, Michigan Bell's \$28,830 cost for one answering station was the low bidder, said Lauboff, who serves on a county task force in charge of studying pricing and getting cost quotes.

The task force received four responses to requests for bids for the system.

Governments requiring more than one answering station will receive a per-station discount if ordering from Michigan Bell, Lauboff said.

MBC will require a 25 percent deposit upon ordering equipment in October, 1987, an additional 25 percent in March 1988 when equipment is delivered, and 40 percent when the system is operational. The remaining 10 percent will be due when the system is approved by the city in August 1988, according to information from the city.

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