

Tuesday, November 1, 2005

Burton may hike sewer, water rates

By Joe Lawlor

BURTON - Residents would pay as much as 40 percent more for water and 50 percent more for sewer service if the city approves the recommendations of a rate study.

Part of the reason for the recommended increase is to pay for expanded sewer capacity in the southeast section of the city and water capacity along Fenton Road, due to increased development.

While rates vary, a household that uses 2,500 cubic feet of water every four months would see quarterly water bills increase from \$55.25 to \$112.33 under those increases.

Resident Dawn Elford said she believes water and sewer rates shouldn't increase, as her water and sewer bills top \$100.

"Our bill is outrageous right now," said Elford, who also complained about a lack of water pressure.

A formal proposal has yet to appear before City Council, and the final rate increases could be more modest.

The cost of the Fenton Road water main project would be shared with Flint Township.

The new sewer line would serve an area east of Center Road and south of Atherton Road, Major said.

Another reason for the sharp increases is because water and sewer rates did not increase as much as they should have over the years, said city consultant Jeff Major, a former city public works employee. Instead, the city absorbed costs within its budget to keep rates low, Major said.

"The water and sewer rates now just can't handle the operation of these two (city) departments," Major said, noting that other communities recently have approved rate increases. "It's our turn."

Major said if nothing is done, the Department of Public Works would become insolvent over the next few years, which could mean layoffs.

Mayor Charles Smiley said residents have been getting a break on their water and sewer bills for years, but the city is now in a more difficult financial situation.

"We can't afford to do that anymore," Smiley said.

Councilman Charles Cross said he's concerned about asking residents to pay more when they're already facing job losses and higher heating bills and gas prices.

"Any increase is a lot for people to take at this time," Cross said. "Even a dollar means a lot to people right now."