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City approves water, sewer rates despite township concerns

By Kathy Jessup | [Kalamazoo Gazette](#)

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KALAMAZOO — The Kalamazoo City Commission Tuesday turned aside a request by one of its major out-of-city customers to delay action on new wastewater utility rates and voted 6-0 to adopt higher charges for both its water and sewer operations.

Under the plan originally proposed by city officials in late 2009, the overall rates are designed to boost wastewater system revenues by 3 percent this year and 5 percent for water.

Rich Pierson, director of the Gull Lake Sewer and Water Authority, sent a letter to the city Monday, asking the commission to postpone the new wastewater rates until a consultant could review the supporting data.

In his letter, Pierson said wastewater treatment costs to the Gull Lake authority have seen annual increases up to 21 percent since 2000, with an average, annual cost increase of 9.6 percent.

Pierson echoed complaints lodged by representatives of other townships served by the Kalamazoo utility.

"...we are no longer being provided pertinent information relative to rates that allows us to make determinations on their reasonableness..." Pierson said in his letter. "The (Gull Lake) Authority's cost of treating wastewater has grown from 31 percent of our annual expenditures in 2000 to 48 percent in (fiscal year) 2009."

Earlier this month, the City Commission delayed acting on the rate proposals after area township supervisors asked for more information and input into how the out-of-city rates were being set. Some representatives said the city was designing rates to lessen the impact on industrial users at the expense of residential and commercial customers, especially those located outside the city limits.

City officials denied that, explaining that wastewater treatment had been significantly affected in recent years by some major industrial customers cutting the amount and strength of their discharges. Changes by the industries saved the companies money but fixed operating costs still had to be met.

Under the new rates, average commercial customers will pay \$23 to \$56 more per quarter for water and sewer, while out-of-city residential customers can expect to pay about \$5 more every three months and in-city customers will pay pennies less a month.

The rates adopted Tuesday night were unchanged from those originally presented to the commission in December.

Public reaction was mixed Tuesday night. One Cooper Township resident said she already considers her \$85 summer water bill "outrageous" and said the current economy should delay additional hikes.

But Nick Boyd, an unsuccessful 2009 city commission candidate, said townships should consider annexation if they don't want to pay out-of-city utility rates.

"I'm a little irked that city water rates are going up," City Commissioner Barbara Miller said. "The city of Kalamazoo is getting their rates raised and the huge spikes in (water) use we see is from the huge mansions (outside the city) that water their lawn."

Contact Kathy Jessup at kjessup@kalamazoogazette.com or (269) 388-8590.