

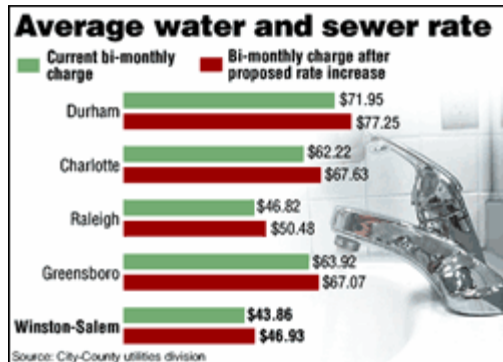
Water, sewer rates to go up in Forsyth

Increase of 7 percent is lowest in past five years

By Michael Hewlett

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(Journal Graphic by Nicholas Weir)

Forsyth residents will pay 7 percent more for their water and sewer starting Oct. 1, the lowest rate increase in the past five years.

Last year, water and sewer rates increased 9 percent. They rose 12 percent in 2003 and 9 percent in both 2001 and 2002.

The City-County Utility Commission unanimously approved the increase yesterday with its annual budget; the additional money will help cover the costs for operating expenses and debt. Commission members met several times in March and April about the budget.

"I think we've got a fairly good budget," commission member Raymond Thomas said.

The budget must be approved by the Winston-Salem City Council, but the commission has the authority to raise the rates. The increase will be included in the city's municipal budget.

The total water and sewer budget is \$56.8 million, a 10 percent increase over this fiscal year.

David Saunders, the utility director, said that some of the increase comes from the higher costs for chemicals used to treat water and wastewater. Chemical budgets have risen by \$502,100, or 29.3 percent, over this fiscal year.

Other expenses include heating fuel, fleet maintenance, operation supplies and sludge-disposal costs. Also, total debt has increased to \$268 million.

The budget also includes a 3 percent merit increase for employees and pays for costs of employee benefits and health insurance.

Saunders said that even with the rate increase, residents will still pay the least of any major city in North Carolina.

The average household's two-month water and sewer bill would rise from \$43.86 to \$46.93 - compared with proposed increases to \$67.07 in Greensboro, \$50.48 in Raleigh, \$67.63 in Charlotte and \$77.25 in Durham.

With the increase, Forsyth County residents will be paying 37 percent more for water than they had in 2001, when the average bill was \$29.47.

The commission also approved a rate increase at the Overdale Yardwaste Facility, from \$22 a ton to \$23 a ton. That rate becomes effective July 1.

• **Michael Hewlett can be reached at 727-7326 or at mhewlett@wsjournal.com**

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