

Village water, sewer rates could jump 20%

Written by MICHAEL LoCICERO

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Water and sewer rates in the Village of Belgium may increase by as much as 20% next year to pay for a major water main replacement project, village officials said Monday.

A typical resident will see an average increase of \$31 on their quarterly water and sewer utility bills if the Public Service Commission approves the village's request, Amy Vaclavik, senior project engineer with McMahon Group in Neenah told the Village Board Monday.

"This increase actually leaves little wiggle room if the village would have to replace any structures or anything other than equipment," Vaclavik said. "This increase is on the low end, but it's important to keep it reasonable for the community."

Another reason for the increase is some minor debt increases the village has taken on by completing capital improvement projects like the Main Street sewer system updates, Vaclavik said.

The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources requires the village to collect revenue from utility bills to create a fund that is used to pay for utility equipment replacement.

The fund will increase from about \$25,000 this year to \$33,000 in 2014.

"For a small community, if you look at what should be contributed, it should be much higher than \$33,000, but it's important to keep the increase reasonable," Vaclavik said. "It would be nice to be able to increase this fund by about 1% each year."

Vaclavik said the numbers should be reviewed by the village's Public Utilities Committee.

If the committee approves the increases, a public hearing must be held before the village board can approve the increase.

Any water rate increase must also be approved by the Public Service Commission, which will also hold a hearing.

In other business:

- The board approved a \$1.2 million 2014 budget that calls for a \$716,000 tax levy, an increase of about \$12,000, or 1.69%.

The budget, which will increase spending by 12.9%, relies on an increase in utility payments made in lieu of taxes and service fees on new construction to balance it.

The budget originally had called for a 2.75% levy increase but was amended after the village

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revised its garbage pickup fees, Clerk Kaity Olsen said.

The village signed a new five-year contract with Advanced Disposal that will result in an assessment of \$135 on homeowners' tax bills. Last year, the assessment was \$105.

"The garbage and recycling fees were recalculated based on the actual number of residences in the village," Olsen said. "That new number put our revenue from collecting up slightly, which caused the levy to decrease by about \$8,000 overall."

The budget was approved on a 5-1 vote, with Trustee Jeffrey Thiel voting against it.

The village will switch from bags to carts for garbage and recycling collection on Jan. 6, as required by Advanced Disposal.

Separate carts will be provided for garbage and recyclables by the contractor. Until then, residents may leave garbage and recycling in bags for pickup.

- The board approved salary increases for village employees, including the marshal and deputy marshal.

The increases for village employees range from 1% to 3% based on performance reviews from department supervisors.

The marshal and deputy marshal will receive a \$250 wage increase.

"The marshals have been working extremely hard and have been exceeding the goals we have set for them," Trustee Jason Acevedo said.

The salaries for village employees were approved 5-1 with Thiel voting against it. The marshals' salaries were unanimously approved.