

Summer sewer credit dropped by village

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 28 November 2012 19:42

Board's split vote reaffirms 2011 decision that had been voided by ordinance snafu

Starting in 2013, Grafton residents will no longer receive summer sewer credits on their utility bills.

Correcting an oversight that allowed the credit to remain in effect this year, the Village Board last week approved an ordinance change eliminating the provision.

The credit, which is also known as a sprinkling credit, has traditionally given residents a break on their utility bills for the second and third quarters.

In allowing the credit, the water and wastewater utility did not charge residents more than they paid for the average of their two winter sewer bills.

In August 2011, the board agreed for the first time to eliminate the credit to encourage water conservation during summer months and help the utility avoid a 5% rate increase. The move was expected to save the utility about \$75,000 annually.

This year, the revenue total doubled because summer drought conditions prompted many residents to use more water than usual.

However, after the third-quarter utility bills were sent out, it was discovered that the board failed to rescind the ordinance that allowed the credit. That forced the village to recalculate utility bills and reimburse residents more than \$150,000.

About 3,000 of the village's 4,500 residential customers — many of whom complained to the village about getting higher bills — were affected by the change and received reimbursements. The total included about 10 customers who received bills of more than \$1,000.

Customers due credits of more than \$100 were issued checks. Lesser amounts were credited to the customers' accounts.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said this week that all customers qualifying for reimbursements have received checks or bill credits.

The board voted 4-3 to eliminate the credit, with trustees Richard Rieck, Susan Meinecke, Lisa Uribe Harbeck and Village President Jim Brunnquell in favor. Trustees Jim Grant, David Liss and Dave Antoine were opposed.

Grant said he opposed the change because removing the credit was like imposing a new tax on residents.

Eliminating the credit was unanimously recommended by the Public Works Board on Nov. 12.

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According to estimates from the utility, the loss of the credit will result in an average increase of \$51 per quarter for residential customers. That amount will vary, however, depending on how customers water their lawns or gardens.

Hofland said that residents are being notified of the elimination of the summer sewer credit on their quarterly utility bills, the village website and newsletter and social media.