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Water, sewer bills to jump 70% in Seaside Park

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SEASIDE PARK — Residents will see their water and sewer bills jump from \$182 per unit per quarter to \$310 — a 70 percent increase — for the rest of this year.

That figure could be higher, borough officials said. However, in 2011 water and sewer customers could pay \$278 per unit per quarter. Though that is still a 53 percent increase over the current bill, it is an amount that residents could pay for the next 17 years, officials said.

The new rates were approved by the Borough Council last week.

"Unfortunately, the water utility is broke, and we have a big bill coming," Councilman David Meyer said.

The borough faces an annual deficit of \$535,000 to \$540,000 in its water and sewer account, which has a surplus of only \$25,000.

In 2008, a project was begun to remove and replace certain parts of the borough's water system, which had some pipes that were more than 100 years old. As well, not a lot of water and sewer work had been performed in the borough in a dozen years, Mayor Thomas E. Connors said at the time.

In August 2008, the council adopted a retroactive rate increase, to \$182 from \$152 per unit per quarter, which helped to pay for 67 percent of the project's first phase. There was no rate increase in 2009.

"Public outcry or not, we should have told people we had no choice," Councilman Michael Tierney said.

Tierney added that the intention was for a surplus to be built up to use for payments of debt and interest.

But there were other water and sewer projects that required attention, including a problem with a well, Connors said. The water and sewer funds available were used for that work, and this year the borough has begun paying the debt on the earlier infrastructure project.

Ninety percent of the money generated from the rate hike will go toward paying the debt, with the increase taking effect in the second quarter bill.

With the second phase of the project in its design stage, borough officials are working on how to pay for the work. At the time of the first phase, the best bond the council could get was for a 20-year period. The borough hopes to obtain a 30- or 40-year bond, which would lessen the amount of annual payments.