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Hearing on United Water's rate rise request is March 8

Elected officials to oppose increase

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TOMS RIVER BUREAU

BERKELEY — Residents will get a chance to comment on United Water Toms River's latest petition for a rate increase in about three weeks at two sessions at the township municipal building.

Representatives from the Berkeley and Toms River township councils are expected to be there. Both councils adopted resolutions opposing any rate increase soon after the water company filed its request with the state Board of Public Utilities on Nov. 18.

In addition, representatives from the 9th Legislative District oppose the increase.

"Unquestionably, this increase would have a detrimental impact on our constituents living in Berkeley Township, a significant number of whom are seniors living on retirement-fixed incomes," state Sen. Christopher J. Connors, Assemblyman Brian E. Rumpf and Assemblywoman DiAnne C. Gove, all R-Ocean, said in a letter.

United Water Toms River's service territory includes a population of 125,000 in Toms River, South Toms River and Berkeley's Manitou Park section and Holiday City and Silver Ridge Park adult communities.

The newest request for a rate increase comes after the BPU unanimously approved a 62 percent rate increase for United Water Toms River customers in January 2009.

The two-phase rate increase took effect last November, with the first phase resulting in approximately \$24 more per quarter for an average customer using 60,000 gallons of water each year. The second and final phase of the increase, an additional \$13 per quarter, came in December.

A residential customer using an average of 16,000 gallons of water per quarter will see the bill increase from \$99.10 to \$138.48, an increase of \$39.38 per quarter or approximately 39.7 percent, according to the notice of the hearing that was published in local newspapers.

United Water officials have said the cost of water delivered to customers is less than 1 penny per gallon, and that at the time new rates could go into effect, more than \$29 million of investments will have been put into service since the company's last rate decision.

The investments include the water company's upgrade to the Holly Water Treatment Plant in Toms River completed in May and the construction of the Berkeley Radionuclide Treatment Plant on Mule Road in Berkeley, which is on schedule, according to company spokeswoman Jane Kunka.

This article includes information from previously published stories.