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South Brunswick reconsiders hefty hike in water, sewer rates

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SOUTH BRUNSWICK — A 12 percent increase in water and sewer rates to help close an \$800,000 deficit was considered by the Township Council at Tuesday night's work session, but a township spokesman said Wednesday that other options will be explored.

Spokesman Ron Schmalz said Township Manager Matthew Watkins has decided there will be no increase. Schmalz said Watkins would likely speak more about the issue at the next township budget meeting scheduled Jan. 19 at 4 p.m. in the municipal building.

Township officials from the water and sewer and public works departments, as well as the tax assessor's office, are expected to address the Township Council during the meeting.

Residents currently pay \$118.20 quarterly in a separate bill they receive from the township for water and sewer services.

Chief Financial Officer Joe Monzo said the rate went up 10.47 percent increase last year; that hike took effect after the first quarter.

Mayor Frank Gambatese said at the meeting that the increase was needed because water consumption was down 10 percent, dropping from 1.7 billion gallons of water used in 2008 to 1.5 billion last year.

He attributed the drop in usage, at least in part, to the "wet year we've had," which reduced the need for things like lawn sprinklers.

Councilman Joe Camarota asked during the meeting, "How did we get to this point without any previous knowledge?"

He suggested that the township renegotiate the contract with New Jersey American Water, South Brunswick's main water supplier, and make some cuts in the water and sewer department if necessary.

"We can't have the public absorb \$800,000," Camarota added.