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## Sayreville Borough Council set to vote on water rate hike

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SAYREVILLE — A public hearing and final vote on a proposed ordinance that calls for a 13-percent increase in water rates is scheduled for Monday's Borough Council meeting

The measure was proposed to close a \$982,822 deficit in revenue from last year and a projected \$675,713 deficit this year. When introduced at the last council meeting council members Kenneth Kelly, Nicholas Perrette and Paula Siarkiewicz voted in favor of the hike, while Council members David Kaiserman, Frank Bella and Lisa Eicher voted against it. Mayor Kennedy O'Brien cast the deciding vote.

If approved, on average a family of four would see an increase of about \$17.50 each quarter.

In November, the borough's water woes were brought to the attention of council members.

The reduction in revenue was attributed to a decrease in the amount of water used by big users, including Gerda Ameristeel, the borough's largest water customer, which curtailed operations during the year. A decrease in use by residents, due to a wet summer, also was attributed to the loss in revenue.

A proposed ordinance that would have raised rates by 20 percent on Jan. 1 was defeated.

With the defeat of that increase, Mayor Kennedy O'Brien had said property taxes would probably have to be increased.

The borough's chief financial officer, Wayne Kronowski, with the help of Sandy Triolo, director of the water and sewer department, and borough Business Administrator Jeff Bertrand and Frank Perrette, the councilman who chairs the finance committee, were able to reduce expenditures by almost \$1 million from last year, bringing the proposed rate hike to 13 percent.

The reduction was possible due to several factors, including the shifting of personnel from water to sewer and an anticipated reduction in use, which lowered the costs of chemicals and electricity that are used in water production, Kronowski said.

"It's a very tight budget," Kronowski said. "The water budget stands on its own. If they run short, we'll have to do an emergency appropriation, which would have to be funded in following year budget. That's why we like to have a little cushion, but this won't give us one. We're keeping it bear bones to keep the increase as low as possible."

Kronowski said, if the department is running a large surplus, the council can roll back rates at a later date.

Perrette said he is expecting to receive a monthly report from the water department, which will give officials the opportunity to monitor the situation.

Under the proposed ordinance, seniors 65 and over will continue to receive a 5-percent discount on their water bill, Perrette said.