

Suburban

Old Bridge • Sayreville

Water rate increase of 13% moves ahead

Public hearing on rate hike proposal set for Feb. 8

BY JENNIFER BOOTON Staff Writer

Sayreville officials are moving forward with a 13 percent water rate increase in order to tackle a large deficit in the water and sewer budget.

An ordinance to enable the increase, which is recommended by borough Chief Financial Officer Wayne Kronowski and has been reduced from previous proposals, was introduced by a split Borough Council on Monday.

The council was deadlocked 3-3 over whether to pass the ordinance on to a second and final reading, but Mayor Kennedy O'Brien cast the tie-breaking vote in favor of the increase. Council members Frank Bella and David Kaiserman, both Republicans, and Democrat Lisa Eicher opposed the ordinance, while Republicans Paula Siarkiewicz, Nicholas Perrette and Ken Kelly voted to move forward with it. With O'Brien's tiebreaker vote, the public hearing and possible adoption will now take place at the Feb. 8 meeting.

The increase is necessary to close the \$851,000 deficit, the result of a relatively cool, rainy spring and summer and a faulty economy, Kronowski said. The borough lost some \$1.7 million in revenue from 2008 to 2009 due to a sharp decline in water consumption.

The water rate increase has been brought down significantly since Kronowski first recommended it in November. The CFO urged the council to consider raising water rates by as much as 40 percent in November, but the ordinance never made it past first reading and was shot down in a 4-2 vote. Those opposed said it was unfair to taxpayers to raise rates and urged the borough professionals to find alternative methods to close the deficit.