

WAUKESHA COMMON COUNCIL

Aldermen approve return flow rate

**Water users could
see \$7.44 increase
on next bill**

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WAUKESHA — Waukesha water customers will see a new charge on their next quarterly bill, under a plan approved Tuesday by the Common Council.

Alderman voted 14-0 to add “return flow” charges to water and sewer bills next month. The new charge, part of the Lake Michigan diversion project, is expected to increase the average residential bill by \$7.44 per quarter.

Starting June 1, water customers will be charged an

additional 62 cents for every 1,000 gallons of water consumed. The charge is being assessed to pay for a \$125.6 million pipeline that will return water back to Lake Michigan.

The added line item, which previously received the backing of the Waukesha Water Commission and the Board of Public Works, is expected to put \$700,000 of revenue into the Waukesha Water Utility budget for the remaining seven months of the year, explained Dan Duchniak, the utility’s general manager.

Although construction on the 15-mile pipeline is not expected to begin until 2020, utility officials are in the early stages of designing and permitting the return flow

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infrastructure. Last month the utility took out \$16.6 million in anticipation notes to fund the improvements.

Utility staffers have said the intent is to implement rate increases in a series of gradual steps so users are not met with a sizable wallop all at once.

According to utility projections, the return flow charge is expected to increase to \$1.84 per 1,000 gallons of water consumed next year, or about \$22.19 per quarter for an average residential user. Regular sewer and water rates are also expected to increase gradually over the next five years, with average quarterly bills for water, sewer and return flow charges projected to total \$324 by the year 2023.

Discussing those projections on Tuesday, Duchniak noted that the numbers don't take into the account the potential for federal aid that could end up reducing the burden on ratepayers.

"This assumes that all of the money will be spent over that time period; that we won't see reductions in the cost of the program itself. And it assumes that there is no other federal assistance associated with this," he said.

Mayor Shawn Reilly has expressed optimism about the city's chances of being approved for at least some assistance through the Water Infrastructure Finance and Innovation Act.

The city and utility plan to apply for aid through the WIFIA program, which provides low-cost supplemental loans for regionally and nationally significant water infrastructure projects.

The city's application is due July 9, and Reilly said the city could find as early as September if it will be approved for aid.