

City raising water rate for borough, Coast Guard

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

excess of 5,000 gallons per month.

In addition, water customers who use more 5,000 gallons per month in the first, second and fourth quarters of the year would see a 1 percent increase.

Bulk water rates for

Cape May Point and the U.S. Coast Guard base would also increase.

During a special meeting March 30, Mayor Zack Mullock said the city's water utility has been operating at a loss. He said the bulk rate increase for

Cape May Point and the base would generate an additional \$23,000 each in revenue per year.

Mullock said the 5 percent increase only on excess water in the third quarter would bring the water/sewer department an additional \$200,000 with a goal of a \$300,000 increase of water/sewer revenue for the next two years. Those using less than 5,000 gallons would see no increase while excess users would see a 5 percent increase but only during the third quarter of the year, he said.

"We will be working, however, to make sure our water and sewer utility is solvent," Mullock said.

He noted the city is planning to upgrade its desalination plant, adding that the cost will not be paid from the utility budget but

be bonded by the city.

Cape May Point purchases water from Cape May on a bulk rate with an interlocal agreement running from 2016 through 2024 with automatic renewal in five-year increments.

Mullock said a special council meeting was called for March 30 since the city was within a 90-day window for a water rate adjustment for Cape May Point. He said his understanding was water rates for the borough had not been adjusted in the past four years and an escalator clause following the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was built into the contract.

The bulk rates paid by the Point include a fee for capital and operational costs of Cape May's desalination plant. Beginning May 1, Cape May Point

will pay \$8.05 per 1,000 gallons of water.

Mullock said the bulk water contract with the Coast Guard base had not been revisited in 20 years. He said the rates were low and city taxpayers were subsidizing the Coast Guard base, particularly on sewer rates. The city is rewriting the contract, the mayor said.

The bulk water rate for the Coast Guard base would be \$8.05 per 1,000 gallons and a sewer rate of \$10.34 per 1,000 gallons.

The mayor said the city should be seeking ways to cut costs including an analysis of storm water entering the sanitary sewer system, increasing costs paid to the county Municipal Utilities Authority. In 2007, the city undertook a project to stop infiltration of storm water.



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Outdoor dining extended

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outside, he said.

The city is not trying to increase the total number of seats an establishment can use but is being flexible where the seats can be allocated, Bezaire said.

City solicitor Chris Gillen-Schwartz said rules were largely being carried over from 2020. He said a restaurant can locate outdoor seating on private property plus there is an opportunity to use the city's right of way or sidewalk.

Applications to use city-owned space are to be sent to the city manager's office and clerk's office.

"There will be a review from the zoning officer, fire chief, police chief and construction official," he said.

Many businesses have applications from last year and the city is requiring those to be updated for 2021, Gillin-Schwartz

said. If a business is not changing anything from last year, they need to provide that in writing to the city clerk, he added.

For an establishment applying to use the city right of way, a licensing agreement needs to be struck with the city, proof of insurance provided and a document indemnifying the city, Gillin-Schwartz said.

"If you are changing, the changes need to be shown on a plan just like they were before and that needs to be updated for our file," he said.

Gillin-Schwartz said applications to use city rights of way must be approved by City Council. Outdoor dining areas this year may be utilized between 7 a.m. and midnight, when tables are to be removed.

Applicants must provide a plan for dealing with litter and comply with the state Alcoholic Beverage Control for an extension of premises.

The city has the right to revoke a temporary outdoor dining permit.

The owner would have the right of appeal to the Zoning Board.

Sheehan said outdoor seating is taking up parking spaces and costing the city revenue. She said turning off parking meters on Beach Avenue represented a \$32,000 revenue loss.

Bezaire said he spoke with merchants on the block of Beach Avenue that houses Y.B. and South End Surf Shop. He said most of the merchants did not want the block closed off for sidewalk dining.

"This summer the city is going to gain seven more metered spots that we didn't have last year because those merchants agreed they didn't want those barricades there," Bezaire said.

Sheehan said she did not want to give something to one business and take away something from another. Bezaire said he did not hear more parking complaints last year than in the past 20 years.

Mullock said the city has made sacrifices to help businesses.

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