

SUFFOLK COUNTY

Water rate vote set

BY RICK BRAND
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The Suffolk Water Authority board Tuesday will vote on a proposed 3.75 percent rate increase that would raise the average customer's bill about \$14.79 in the coming year.

Board deliberations on the proposed rate hike will take place after the authority's five-member board holds a public hearing at the agency's Oakdale headquarters on Sunrise Highway Tuesday at 4 p.m. to get customers' input.

The rate increase, which would take effect as of April 1, is estimated to bring in \$4.35 million in new revenue to help offset cost increases in the authority's 2018-19 budget, effective June 1.

Officials attribute expected budget increases to higher health insurance and electricity costs that are beyond the

agency's control as well as the new accounting rule requiring the authority to fully budget for projected post-retirement benefits beyond the pension. However, final budget details are not yet available, said authority officials.

Under the proposed rate increase, the average residential customer, who uses 160,000 gallons of water annually, will see their bill rise from the current \$395 to \$409 a year.

While the authority's outside consultant, Municipal and Financial Services Group recommended a rate hike exceeding six percent, officials say the authority will be able to curb the rate increase by using several one-shot revenue. One is the sale of a former authority office building in Southold, which sold for \$510,000; the other is a restructuring of antenna leases with T-Mobile, which is expected to bring in

\$2.25 million in revenue.

Not included in the new rate proposal is any plan to impose higher conservation rates on authority customers that use far more water than the average customers, usually for lawn watering. Last year, a discussion of such a multitiered system stalled over worries that higher charges would be imposed on multifamily dwellings like apartment and condominiums which may seem large users but use less on a per unit than the average home consuming 160,000 gallons annually.

While officials say the state has encouraged such conservation-oriented rates to curb water use, James Gaughran, authority chairman, said he believes it should be done by state legislation. Despite the proposed increase, Patrick Halpin, another board member, said Suffolk's water rates "are the best deal in town."



BRANDEE DADDONA

Well,
that's
a wrap

SOUTHAMPTON. Town employees Nicholas Labate of Miller Place, left, and Jeff Wilson of Southampton learn about tourniquets Monday at Town Hall, aided by Stony Brook Medicine Trauma Center trainers.



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