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## Sayreville council approves water rate hike

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SAYREVILLE — Borough residents and businesses will soon see a hike in their water bills after Borough Council members approved a 13-percent hike at Monday's meeting.

The council voted 3 to 3 to approve the hike.

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.

A resident whose bill averages about \$138 a quarter will see an increase of about \$17.55 each quarter or a little more than 19 cents a day, Perrette said.

The hike will take effect on all water bills after March 1, said Wayne Kronowski, the borough's chief financial officer.

The rate hike was proposed to close a \$982,822 deficit in revenue from last year and a projected \$675,713 deficit this year.

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

In January, the council voted down a proposed ordinance that would have raised rates by 20 percent.

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

Kronowski, with the help of various other officials, were able to reduce expenditures by almost \$1 million from last year, bringing the proposed rate hike to 13 percent.

Kronowski warned officials that by keeping the increase as low as possible, there is no cushion in the event revenue runs short. He also noted that if the department is running a large surplus, the council can roll back rates at a later date.

Councilwoman Siarkiewicz, who voted for the hike, pointed to a memorandum from the water and sewer department that showed Sayreville, when compared to other municipalities, has one of the lowest water and sewer rates in the area.

"For me this is the fair way to do it," she said. "Everybody takes responsibility. You get charged on how much you use."

Kaiserman, who voted against the hike, argued that it was a temporary fix and was concerned another shortfall would result in further rate increases.

Perrette said he expects to receive a monthly report from the water department, which will let officials monitor the situation.

He also said that, in the future, the borough may be able to expand its facilities or sell water outside the borough, which could increase revenues.