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South Plainfield homeowners, businesses to pay higher sewer rates

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SOUTH PLAINFIELD — Thousands of home - and business owners will pay more to have their sewage treated and disposed of starting July 1 to help continue paying for a large expansion agenda for the Middlesex County system.

Residential rates will rise \$15 per year, according to Administrator and Chief Financial Officer Glenn Cullen, while commercial users will see hike of varying amounts, depending on their classification, Cullen said. The borough divides commercial sewage customers into nine separate classes based on the volume of sewage discharged annually. In addition, large industrial users — which have their own separate distinction altogether — are billed for four separate services, including chlorine, oxygen, flow in millions of gallons and suspended solids. The rates for all those services will rise accordingly.

The minimum annual charge for any commercial user, regardless of class, will be \$540, according to the new rates approved Monday (April 5) night by the Borough Council.

"It's to keep up with all the treatment costs," said Cullen of the hikes.

The Plainfield Area Regional Sewage Authority, which is made up of all or parts of eight municipalities including South Plainfield, has been raising rates to reflect higher operating costs imposed by the Middlesex County Utilities Authority, which has been charging more to fund a large capital expansion blueprint, noted Cullen.

But the administrator/CFO said other factors were driving up rates, too.

A new office complex operated by Progressive Insurance planned for Durham Avenue has been delayed, and along with it, the one-time sewer hookup fee the borough would have collected of \$60,000. It's now expected the Progressive project will be finished sometime in 2011.

Cullen said the borough is actively pursuing ideas to help keep the future cost of sewer service down, including sharing an existing vacuume machine with another town to unclog jammed sanitary sewer lines. A new machine would cost more than \$150,000, according to Cullen. But both Edison and Plainfield use the sewer vacs and could be approached, said Councilwoman Chrissy Buteas, one of two Democratic council members who opposed the sewer rate hike.

The council, with all six members in support, also voted to refinance nearly \$2.4 million in previous sewer utility bonds, a move that will save nearly \$107,000 over four years in lower interest rates.

The sewer hike is the third in four years for the borough, with previous increases occurring in 2007 and 2008.