

Average MWRA bill is 8: Survey predicts 42 percent water bill increase by 2010

By David McLaughlin / News Staff Writer

Sunday, December 12, 2004

Homeowners in several MetroWest communities saw a hefty spike this year in their water and sewer bills, forcing them to dish out nearly 0 on average, according to a new study.

The rate survey, released by the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority Advisory Board, documented another round of increasing water and sewer bills, which have risen more than 18 percent in three years.

Homeowners living in one of the 60 communities served by the MWRA, including Framingham and Natick, saw an average jump of , or 5.6 percent, in their bills, which totaled 8 in 2004, according to the survey. The average bill is based on 90,000 gallons of use.

Joe Favaloro, the executive director of the advisory board, called this year's increase "rather large." Since 1991, combined water and sewer bills in MWRA towns have doubled, according to the report.

"The other thing the survey very strongly states is that MWRA service rates continue to be among the highest in the country at a time when there continues to be federal mandates without any federal dollars," Favaloro said.

Skyrocketing bills are a problem MetroWest knows well.

"We've watched the MWRA rates increase, I think, every year, and we have absolutely nothing we can do about that except pass it on to the ratepayers," said Natick Selectman Jay Ball.

And there appears to be little relief in sight. The MWRA is projecting a 42 percent increase in its wholesale rates between fiscal year 2006 and 2010, and with communities facing their own increasing costs of doing business, bills will continue to rise, Favaloro said.

According to the survey, Nahant recorded the highest average water and sewer bill in 2004 among the MWRA cities and towns at ,510. Locally, Ashland and Natick residents were hit with the biggest bills among MetroWest towns served by the MWRA. Each town had an average bill of more than ,000.

Framingham, Marlborough and Northborough, meanwhile, were all under the average 8 bill, according to the study.

Natick homeowners may see a break, however, in 2005. Selectmen there are debating using 0,000 stashed in the town's water and sewer enterprise fund to keep rates stable, Ball said. In that case, a homeowner whose water and sewer use remains the same as in 2004 will not see a jump in their bill.

Although some have argued for using more money from the fund to cut rates, Ball said, the board wants to keep enough money so the town can pay for capital projects in cash instead of borrowing for them.

Ball credited the town's strong financial management for the chance to keep rates steady next year.

"This has been the result of the town administrator and chief financial officers, and I think they serve the town of Natick and the citizens of Natick very well," he said.