



Dade City Residents Get Higher Water Fees

By Laura Kinsler

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DADE CITY - Water and sewer customers can expect to see higher rates in March.

City commissioners adopted a new rate structure that could raise the average customer's bill \$5.46 a month.

Customers who live outside the city limits will be charged 25 percent higher rates, meter fees, deposits and connection fees.

City Manager Billy Poe said the city needs to raise its rates and impact fees to pay for improvements to the utility lines and for a future expansion of the wastewater treatment plant. The city won \$16 million in grants to help pay for the improvements.

The plan also more than quadruples water and sewer impact fees for new customers.

The impact fee for a new single-family home would go from \$1,185 under the current rate structure to \$5,264. Water and sewer connection fees would go from \$675 to \$812 for new customers outside the city.

Developers spoke against the higher impact fees, which go into effect June 1.

John Finnerty, president of East Pasco Habitat for Humanity, said the higher fees would be "extremely detrimental" to the families he serves. Habitat owns about 70 lots that would be affected.

"We need your help on this one," he said. "We're the only builder who will be affected by this in the short term."

Dante Fraiegari, area manager for Metro Development, said the new impact fees should be phased in over three years. His company is planning a 1,143-lot subdivision in Dade City, but it has been on hold for two years.

City Attorney Karla Owens said developers can lock in the current rate if they pay their impact fees before June.

"We're not opposed to doing our fair share," Fraiegari said. "We don't have the liquid capital to pay upfront."

Owens said she would be willing to meet with the active developers to try to reach a solution.

Several residents of The Pines subdivision used Tuesday's public hearing to complain about low water pressure in their community. Homeowner Pat Sanuita, said she and her neighbors cannot use lawn sprinklers.

Patricia Titsworth, said it would be easier to accept the rate increase if "what we pay for in the Pines is more than a trickle."

Poe said the community meets minimum standards, but "does not meet the citizens' expectation." He recommended using revenue from impact fees to install a booster pump to increase water pressure.

"What we have is an aging infrastructure, and if we don't do something now, we're out of business," Mayor Scott Black said.

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