

## Aquarion seeks increase in water service revenues Local customers could see their bills increase 21% by end of year

By Karen Goulart, The Patriot Ledger

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HINGHAM — Local Aquarion Water Co. customers could see their bills go up about 21 percent by year's end.

Seeking a \$3.1 million increase in water-service revenues. Aquarion filed an application with the state Department of Public Utilities on Wednesday.

Locally, the company serves Hingham, Hull, North Cohasset and Norwell. It also serves Millbury and Oxford.

A statement released by Aquarion on Wednesday said a final ruling on the request is expected in March 2009. It would be the first rate increase since 2001.

In the statement, Aquarion Senior Vice President Larry Bingaman said the request is being driven primarily by more than \$21 million in system improvements made since the last increase. Increases in the company's expenses are another factor, he said.

"These investments have improved service reliability and quality as well as increased water supply," Bingaman said. "The case is also necessitated by cost increases that the company has experienced."

If the company's request is approved, a customer who uses about 175 gallons of water per day will pay \$2.03 a day, in increase of 36 cents.

Bingaman noted that a 20-ounce bottle of water costs between \$1.09 and \$1.49 at local convenience stores.

Under the company's proposal, the fire service protection charge paid by towns that Aquarion serves would increase 13.39 percent.

In addition to offsetting capital spending, the rate hike would result in new customers paying a system development charge, the revenue from which would be spent on developing new water sources and enlarging transmission and distribution mains.

The company would also implement rates that rise as usage increases – the goal being to promote water conservation.

In addition, Aquarion plans to launch a pilot customer-assistance program that would make some low-income customers eligible for \$50 credits.

The request for the increase comes as state Sen. Robert Hedlund, R-Weymouth, and state Rep. Garrett Bradley, D-Hingham, continue to push for an extension of a state-financed rebate that partially offsets the rate increase caused by the Hingham-Hull District water treatment facility going online in 1996.

The rebate, which started in 1998, expired in January.

Aquarion representatives will attend the next selectmen's meeting, at 7 p.m. Tuesday, to explain and discuss the rate-change application.

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<http://www.patriotledger.com/news/x1192321950/Aquarion-seeks-increase-in-water-service-revenues>