

Increase in water rates necessary for cost-recovery

By Mark Pavilons

Water rates are going up again in King in 2020, and some residents aren't too happy about it.

A staff presentation at council Dec. 2 revealed the rate hikes coming in the new year are the result of a multi-year phased increase by the Region of York. Municipalities are being encouraged to make their water and wastewater services pay for themselves. Mandates from the Province have added to the burden, which is being passed on to homeowners.

King residents will see their blended water rates rise by \$146.86 next year, or \$12.23 per month. While this is a roughly 9.3% hike, it's a case of being financially responsible, saving for the future and being proactive.

For average homeowners, their annual total bill will rise from \$1,577 this year, to \$1,723.90 in 2020.

Treasurer Allan Evelyn helped put this in perspective with some comparisons. The blended rate of roughly \$4.15 per cubic metre is equivalent to a little over 13, 10-minute showers, which works out to 32 cents per shower.

Evelyn noted these are reasonable costs for the services provided and recovering costs is not discretionary, it's necessary.

Key drivers, according to Evelyn, are provincial mandates and a directive that municipalities ensure that appropriate infrastructure and management of their systems are in place.

As well, York Region's water and wastewater plan, released in 2015, set the water rates at 9% annually through 2020. A smaller municipality like King, with fewer residents, feels the impact much more than urban areas. Of King's total population, roughly 19,000 urban residents are on municipal water.

Compounding the situation locally is the fact King's water and wastewater reserves are in the hole by \$3.5 million. Recent spending included replacement of watermains in Schomberg, upgrades to pumping stations and repairs to sewers in Nobleton.

King's water rate includes both fixed and variable components, which include a base charge and a tiered one based on usage. The majority of residents are at the lowest tiered level.

Evelyn noted to help with cost-recovery next year and beyond, the Township will look at managing its assets and continue to identify operating efficiencies. He said they have to balance costs with pressures on taxpayers.

Mayor Steve Pellegrini also helped put things in perspective. Most rural homeowners would love to be on municipal water, but they have to rely on wells and septic systems. Using his own home as an example, the mayor said his costs, in terms of usage, well maintenance, filters, [electronic water softener](#), and any repairs, are more than \$2,400 a year, well above the average water/sewer rates. On top of this, his water isn't necessarily guaranteed to be safe to drink.

While no residents attended the council meeting to make a presentation, Nancy Hopkinson of Nobleton submitted a letter to council to voice her displeasure.

"The huge increase in the cost of water and wastewater for the average King resident is unfair," she said.

She wondered whether developers are paying their fair share when using Township water. She also wanted to know how meters and hydrants are monitored and why there's a two-tiered system in place.

Regarding the spending in Nobleton, she said those sewers have been "problematic."

"The crews are forever popping up and down these manholes on my street and the problems never seem to get fixed. Shouldn't the Township of King be suing the contractors who installed these obviously faulty sanitary sewers in the first place? How much money overall has been spent on trying to fix the problems with these sewers from their installation date?"

"The water rates proposed for the village residents are way too high. The residents seem to be subsidizing the developers and this is not fair. Developers need to pay their fair share. The bulk water rates should be increased significantly and developers should pay for their water usage.

"The Township should be able to account for every drop of water that York Region supplies and each user should pay its fair share," she wrote.