

King homeowners face small hike in water rates

By Mark PavilonsEditor

Average homeowners will face a blended 3.21% hike in their combined water and wastewater rates in 2022. Township staff and councillors were quick to point out the water and wastewater system is based on a user-pay, cost-recovery strategy. Water rates are calculated by usage so the more you use, the more you pay. For average users, they won't notice much of a difference this year. The blended rate, based on lower tier, 270 cubic metre use, will cost homeowners roughly \$37.04 more in 2022. It works out (on 270 cubic metre usage) to roughly \$1,200 per year and the increase is just over \$3 per month. King Treasurer Peggy Tollett explained the majority of King residents (71%) are in the tier 1 range, while 22% are in the upper tier 3 level. The water and wastewater system is based on both fixed and variable rates. The Township is adamant that the fees charged pay for both water and infrastructure. Of the typical water bill, King only gets to use 28%, while York Region gets the lion's share of 72%. York Region is responsible for bulk water supply and transmission, as well as wastewater treatment and trunk sewer systems. The Township is responsible for the operation and maintenance of local water distribution and sewage collection pipes in King City, Nobleton, Schomberg and Ansonveldt. A roughly 3.3% rate hike will continue through 2027, with an estimated increase of 2.9% beyond that year. The per cubic metre charge varies, ranging from \$1.88 to \$4.27. The average household, according to data, uses roughly 257 cubic metres per water per year, with baths, showers, dishwasher, laundry, toilets, etc. The "sticker shock" comes when you water your lawns and gardens. The use of sprinklers and hoses over the summer catapults the water use and the cost. Tollett also noted King has to take its infrastructure and reserves into consideration in its long-term planning. Currently, the municipality has a water reserve of just over \$1.1 million, but the wastewater side is in debt by \$1.8 million. This leaves an overall deficit of roughly \$700,000, something that Tollett estimates will take 18 months to pay down. It was noted that 46% of residents "less than half" are on municipal water. That's the biggest reason the Township can't subsidize the costs, and they are a user-pay system. Mayor Steve Pellegrini noted King can't use tax dollars so half of the residents can have the luxury of municipal water. It's that simple. "We are taking a balanced approach to ensure water quality is maintained while recognizing the financial challenges some of our residents may be facing during the pandemic," the mayor added. "Staff brought forward rate increases that are below inflationary pressures and will still allow us to continue to offer the safe and reliable services our residents depend on." Municipalities are required by the Sustainable Water and Sewage Act of 2002 to recover the full cost of providing water services to the public.