

Lower rates for water, sewer on the way

By Ron Page

Morrisville residents can expect good news when their combined water and sewer bills arrive in the mail Nov. 1. They will be lower.

Total charges will be down 10 per cent for the combined rate of the utilities. Except for a few outlying properties, most residents and businesses use both water and sewer.

The town estimates a savings of about \$5 per month for the average monthly bill of \$50, which covers 5,000 gallons of water a month.

The Board of Commissioners adjusted the rates to comply with the contract to buy those utilities from Cary.

The move also promises an end to a ban on apartment construction that has lasted almost a year. Next April commissioners are expected to lift the ban on apartment construction they imposed in 1994 for lack of water and sewer capacity.

Town Manager Bill Cobey says Morrisville is grateful to the Town of Cary. "It means we can go ahead with development over the next 20 to 25 years. We can put the money into capacity rather than pipes," he explained.

Cobey says savings to residents and businesses will vary with the amount of water and sewer used.

"For someone who uses 10,000 gallons a month, yearly savings could be about \$120," he says. "Likewise, savings will be less for the small office or warehouse business compared to, let's say, a motel or restaurant."

As for the water and sewer agreement, Mayor pro tem Billy Sauls says he feels comfortable with it. "I don't recall anything being more important," he told fellow commissioners following the vote for approval.

While Morrisville residents can anticipate water costs to increase 18 cents per 1,000 gallons to \$2.87 cents, they will pay less for sewer service. Commissioners cut the sewer rate by \$1.18 per 1,000 gallons from \$7.24 to \$6.06.

That reflects an overall decrease of 10 per cent or \$1 per 1,000 gallons for the combined rate of the utilities. The combined rate will be \$8.93 per 1,000 gallons of water and sewer, plus a small administrative fee. It is now \$9.93.

In making the motion for the move, Commissioner Bill Ufferman told fellow commissioners that Morrisville will now be in compliance with the Cary agreement. Cary will pump as much as one million gallons of water to Morrisville daily, doubling the 500,000 it now sells to the town.

Cary charges its water and sewer customers a combined rate of \$5.33 per 1,000 gallons—\$2.87 per 1,000 gallons of water and \$2.46 per 1,000 gallons for sewer. In comparison, Morrisville is high because of the small economies of scale from its two treatment plants for wastewater.

The contract with Cary is for 20 years, and calls for Cary to provide (but only after expansions at the Cary-Apex water plant and the North Cary wastewater treatment plant in the next two years) up to three million gallons of water daily and two million gallons of sewage capacity to Morrisville.

Here's how the agreement is structured:

- Over the next two years, Morrisville is to pay Cary \$4.1 million for water and sewer capacity. Additional annual payments will also be made.

- Morrisville initially will pay Cary \$1 million to buy water capacity and \$1.5 million for sewer capacity. A bond referendum passed by voters several years ago will provide those funds.

- Next year, Cary will get an added \$644,000 from Morrisville for water capacity and \$1 million for sewer capacity.

- Finally, after the expansion of the two plants in two years, Morrisville will pay \$500,000 a year for water capacity, and \$450,000 for sewer capacity.

"For the past few months, a lot of residential, commercial and industrial projects have been put on hold," said Morrisville Chamber of Commerce President Raymond Lech. "There were questions as to whether we'd go with Raleigh or Cary, and the time frame for action also entered the picture.

"Large investors didn't want to sit for months. This should free things up to accomplish some growth."

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