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"News from Next Door"

35 cents

Tax bills go out next week

County bills for both towns

CATHY WILSON
Staff Writer

Don't be surprised to find one of the most dreaded items in the history of mankind lurking in your mailbox next week.

Approximately 15,000 tax bills will be mailed after Aug. 18 to property owners in Perquimans County.

Some folks may face sticker shock since this is the first tax bill to reflect the new property revaluations and new tax rates that went into effect July-1.

In the county, property assessments increased approximately 85 percent. An ad valorem tax rate of 41 cents was adopted, giving county taxpayers an effective tax decrease of 2 cents per \$100 assessed valuation.

In Hertford, assessments went up approximately 79 percent. A tax rate of 35 cents was adopted, giving Hertford taxpayers an effective tax increase of 8 cents.

And in Winfall, property assessments averaged increasing 84 percent. A tax rate of 41 cents was adopted, giving town taxpayers an effective tax increase of 12 cents.

Whether or not an individual's taxes will increase depends on whether or not real property or vehicles owned increased or decreased in value, and if so, by how much.

Taxes are due Sept. 1, but may be paid without penalty before Jan. 6, 2009. A 2 percent penalty will be applied on Jan. 6. An additional 3/4 percent is added for each month afterwards for non-payment.

The Perquimans County Tax Department is charged with the responsibility of getting out tax bills and for collecting bill payments for the county and the towns of Hertford and Winfall.

Their collection rate for last year is 97.36 percent, above the state average for counties within the same population grouping.

GETTING READY



Photos courtesy of PHIL HARRIS



PERQUIMANS HIGH SCHOOL IS a beehive of activity as construction workers and school employees work to complete renovations and move into new spaces in time to welcome students on Aug. 25. The former gymnasium (pictured) is quickly becoming a media center and classrooms. Back in the former media center and administrative offices, remodeling is creating much easier access from the school's front door, as well as roomier offices, waiting areas, conference rooms and much-needed storage. Superintendent Dr. Dwayne Stallings said Monday that the building is scheduled for completion by next Monday.

Town ups electric rates

CATHY WILSON
Staff Writer

Hertford will increase electric rates, but will ease the increase into effect over a period of six months.

Monday night, members of Hertford Council approved a rate hike of 9.8 percent for residential customers and 11.7 percent for commercial customers. Half of that increase will go into effect on the September bill, and the other half will be added starting with the January billing.

A customer using an average of 100 kilowatts a month will see a hike of about \$6.15 in September and an additional \$6.15 in January.

The graduated increase passed on a 3-2 vote with council members Ann White and JoAnn Morris voting no.

ElectriCities, the company that supplies power to the town for distribution, increased its cost to the town by 14 percent effective Aug. 1, costing the town \$280,000 more for electricity annually. The town has absorbed that increase since the first of the month.

Town Manager John Christensen presented a proposed rate hike in total, but Mayor Sid Eley suggested splitting the increase throughout the year in an effort to soften the blow to town residents who have already seen an increase in water and sewer rates this year.

The additional wholesale price for power for the town will drain the utility reserve fund, Christensen pointed out, if not passed on to the customers. That reserve fund, he added, is needed to handle unexpected costs in the event of emergency break downs, equipment failure, and/or weather damage to lines and poles.

"All around us, the cost of power is going up," Christensen said. "We're not going to be able to escape that."

Other ElectriCities members have also faced rate increases in their localities. According to Christensen, Elizabeth City increased their electric rates by 14 percent, Edenton—12.5 percent, Progress Energy—16 percent, and North Carolina Dominion Power has requested an 18 percent increase.

Morris said she voted against the proposal because she supported increasing the rates by the full 9.8 percent now.

White said she voted no because of the citizens' inability to pay. She did not, however, offer a solution for paying ElectriCities without raising rates.

Council member Horace Reid encouraged the town to have a plan in place to help customers who fall behind on their bills.

Christensen said the town works with customers who have trouble meeting their bills.

"We'd rather them pay consistently than not at all," he said.

Town to use cistern for watering plants

CATHY WILSON
STAFF WRITER

When it rains, it pours... hopefully right into the town's new cistern constructed alongside the town hall.

Last week, town officials installed a 330-gallon water cistern, the politically correct name for what folks used to call a rain barrel. The cistern, however, is a far cry from the 50-gallon metal drum usually associated with the older term.

The heavy-duty plastic cistern sits on top of an elevated wooden stoop and is attached to the roof's guttering system. The water runs off the roof of the town hall, into the cistern. Gravity causes the rain water to flow from the cistern and into a hose for watering.

Brandon Shoaf, town planner and apparent jack-of-all-trades, constructed the stoop and installed the cistern that will be used to conserve water. Cost of the conservation project is funded through

a 75 percent grant through the Community Conservation Assistance Program with the Perquimans Soil and Water District. The town will fund the additional 25 percent. The town received a \$975 grant for the project, Shoaf said.

The size of a building's roof determines what size cistern one needs. Officials estimate approximately .62 gallons of water will run off per square foot of roof area for each inch of rain that falls.

"We'll use the rainwater to water the plants around the building as well as to fill the water wagon that is used to water the plants downtown," explained Town Manager John Christensen. "If we didn't have the cistern system, we'd have to use potable water, and it costs money to treat water. Rain water will work just as well."

An added awareness of water conservation has resulted from the recent drought throughout the state, Christensen pointed out.

"We all need to find ways to conserve water," he added. "Water has become a very valuable resource.

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John Christensen
Hertford Manager



Perquimans Weekly photo by CATHY WILSON

BRANDON SHOAF AND CHRISTY Manning, town employees, examine the new 330 water cistern recently installed alongside the Hertford Municipal Building. Rain water collected in the cistern will be used to water plants on the municipal lot, as well as the plants downtown.

The cistern also helps control storm water run-off as well.

Christensen is so concerned about water conservation, he and his wife, Susan, also applied for and received a \$1,300 grant through the same program, and just recently installed a 525-gallon round cistern at their home. Their 6 foot by 5 foot cistern, however, is buried in the ground and a pump forces the collected water up through an attached hose.

"It looks like a space capsule. As soon as I finished burying it Saturday,

WEEKEND WEATHER

THURSDAY
HIGH: 87 LOW: 69
MOSTLY SUNNY

FRIDAY
HIGH: 87 LOW: 69
ISOLATED STORMS

SATURDAY
HIGH: 85 LOW: 70
PARTLY CLOUDY

