
After hearing from cash-strapped citizens, Northampton mayor freezes water and sewer rates



Northampton tax-payers can breathe easier about their water bills now that Mayor David J. Narkewicz has decided to freeze them.



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NORTHAMPTON — After **hearing tales of woe and anxiety** from cash-strapped citizens at a City Hall meeting Thursday to discuss hikes in the water and sewer rates, [Mayor David J. Narkewicz](#) has opted to freeze the rates for a year.

Narkewicz had recommended raising each bill by a little less than 3 percent to finance the operations of the [Department of Public Works](#), finance a number of upcoming projects and improvements and pay for older projects such as the \$28.5 million water treatment plant. The meeting came in the wake of a new bill for stormwater disposal that will cost the average household about \$66 a year.

The 40-some people at the meeting, many of them elderly and living on fixed incomes, told the mayor and the City Council Public Works Committee they just can't do it anymore.

"My family is being forced out of Northampton," one woman said. "We're barely scraping by."

Narkewicz warned that delaying the rate increase will result in a double-digit rate increase in the future. But as a result of that hearing, he released a statement Friday telling the public that he heard their concerns.

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"I fielded dozens of questions from city residents concerned about the proposed rate increases and heard first-hand about the financial pressures facing many in our community, particularly senior citizens," he said. "There were also many good ideas presented, including exploring the possibility of implementing tiered rates for water and sewer or a discount for senior citizens and veterans."

Narkewicz said the budget process for water and sewer, which are enterprise funds not included in the general fund process, is particularly important now because it's the first year the rates are set by the City Council. That task had previously fallen to the Board of Public Works, but Narkewicz stripped it of that power when he reorganized city government last year and reduced it to an advisory committee.

"My goal in transferring this important decision-making authority to our city's elected leadership was to ensure maximum fiscal transparency and accountability for residents," the mayor said in his statement. "I stand behind that decision and yesterday's hearing only affirms for me that it was the correct one."

The freeze, Narkewicz said, will also give the city time to consider tiered rates and discounts for seniors and veterans.

"While I did my best to address every question and idea, there are many more that deserve and require further research and study," he said.

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