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## Oldham sewer rates to rise 25 percent on Jan. 1

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Oldham County Sewer District customers will pay 25 percent more for service starting Jan. 1.

Fiscal Court voted 8-1 last week to approve a new budget for the district that includes the increase, which will cost the district's 5,700 customers an additional \$7.30 a month, on average, for 6,000 gallons of water.

It will not affect residents whose homes are on the La Grange or Crestwood sewer systems.

The district's average bills are now \$29.20 a month for 6,000 gallons of water. They would be \$36.50 under the increase.

"As distasteful as I find this, I'm going to support it," Magistrate Rick Rash said before the vote. "It's what has to be done."

Magistrate Scott Davis opposed the budget, saying it should have been discussed in more public meetings.

Judge-Executive Duane Murner, however, said it had been on the table in front of Fiscal Court "at least since June."

The sewer district also has formed an agreement with a worldwide company called Veolia Water, which will take over operations and maintenance of the district to help it become more efficient, Oldham treasurer Stan Clark said.

He said the seven-year contract was expected to start Monday.

Concerned about the sewer district's \$16 million debt, Fiscal Court directed it in June to either cut its operating expenses by \$400,000 a year or have another company take over operations.

Fiscal Court agreed to allow a rate increase if the resolution was met.

The district's board on Oct. 14 discussed the contract in public for the first time, and on Oct. 31 approved the contract with Veolia Water, subject to Fiscal Court's approval of the budget.

Tom Davis, the former chairman of the board, said he's concerned the contract wasn't discussed in the open more.

"It's bizarre that it's been so quiet," he said. "If it's such a good deal, lay it out for the public."

He said the district needed a rate increase of 6 percent or 7 percent every year.

Last year the district pushed for an 8 percent increase, but magistrates approved a rate change that increased the average household bill by 67 cents each month -- though in many cases, people paid less.

Before that there was a 6 percent rate increase approved in 2005, and in 2004 rates were adjusted to a more uniform rate so that some residents paid 38 percent less and others paid as much as 77 percent more.

Oldham County leaders formed the sewer district in 1996 in hopes of eliminating many problematic treatment plants while also reducing the impact on the environment and moving toward a more regionalized system.

The district has eliminated three plants and built two, but a number of aging plants remain, and lately the Environmental Protection Agency and the state Division of Water have added requirements for sewer systems.

The sewer district has received 10 notices of violation from the Division of Water this year for plants including Orchard Grass Hills, which has rainwater issues, Clark said.

"They're urging us to move forward and repair some of the issues we have," Oldham finance officer Shawn Boyle told Fiscal Court.

He said with help from Veolia Water, the district will be able to get plans in motion and show the state it's moving forward.

Under the plans, Veolia Water would operate the district on about \$1.8 million a year, plus about \$400,000 for additional work that would be done each year to address Division of Water requirements, such as cleaning sewer lines.

The \$1.8 million, which Clark said is similar to the district's current budget, would pay for four more employees and extra equipment, among other changes.

Rob Nicholas of Veolia Water said it will have 11 people in the field monitoring the lines and plants. In the past, there have been five employees in the field.

Clark said the rate increase would give the district about \$500,000 more each year. He said that money will be used to address problems at the plants.

While those improvements might lead to additional capacity at treatment plants, that is not the goal, Clark said.

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