

## Realty Group, Large Users Fight Move

Over the opposition of one Councilman and a group of organizations and individuals, City Council's Finance Committee yesterday approved an ordinance authorizing a 20 percent increase in water rates, effective Jan. 1.

Assistant City Solicitor Herman N. Schwartz told the committee he doubted the 20 percent "across the board" increase would ever become effective, because a new water rate structure, now being prepared, in all probability would be adopted by Council before the end of the year.

### EXPLAINS NEW RATE

He explained the new rate schedule is of course, increase rates sufficiently to continue the water system as a self-supporting project, but would remove inequities in existing rates, which have not been changed since 1916.

Answering opponents of the increase, who contended the 20 percent increase was not necessary if a new rate structure was to be adopted, Schwartz said the stop-gap legislation was needed to insure that the water meter replacement program and the water system as a self-supporting project.

### INCREASE LIMITED

The ordinance, approved, excluded the proposed increase on sewer rents for the time being and limited the water rate increase to a 20 percent boost during the calendar year of 1949. If it should become necessary, Council could act at a regular session later in the day, approved a resolution directing Director of Public Works to study the ordinance in cooperation with the Committee of Fifteen in preparation of a new rate structure and submit it to Council by Sept. 30.

The Committee of Fifteen's water expert, Nathan Jacobs, is now preparing a rate schedule, and instructions to report back to the committee by Sept. 1.

### LOAN ACTION REFERRED

At the same session, an ordinance, introduced at the request of Mayor Bernard Samuel, authorizing a \$1,000,000 loan to continue the water improvement program was referred to the Finance Committee for action. The \$1,000,000 loan is needed for water improvements is nearly exhausted and the additional \$1,000,000 is needed to avoid a stoppage of the program.

Opponents of the 20 percent increase asserted that the Finance Committee's action in voting the stop-gap legislation before enactment of the new rate structure is "putting the cart before the horse."

### MAXMAN OPPOSES PLAN

Councilman George Maxman, who opposed the ordinance, criticized the ordinance as "emergency" legislation, adding officials of the Department of Public Works "should have had full knowledge of the situation before this."

He said the law was needed chiefly for laying new water pipe and said he asked that the \$2 per foot assessed against the proposed program for laying water pipes be increased to compensate the city for cost of installing the mains.

### DEFENDS PROPOSAL

If this were done, he insisted, there would be no need for stop-gap legislation. He disputed Councilman George D. Mansfield's contention that the increase in water pipe assessment law was "emergency" legislation. He said that orders of new homes were issued to pay from \$8 to \$10 per foot for laying of water pipes, while a property owner of an apartment had been assessed only \$2.

"Home owners," replied Maxman, "should be required to pay the cost of building their homes. The cost should not be put on everybody."

## 3400 a Year Lost in Water, Taylor Asserts

Blames Faulty Meters and Thieft by Home Owners and Industry

Albert J. Taylor, chief of the Bureau of Water, yesterday fixed at \$200,000 the city's annual loss from faulty water meters and cheating on the part of private and industrial property owners.

"Taylor made this statement as investigator of the city's annual grand jury were running down leads that indicated numerous cases of cheating on water rates.

The bureau chief said his men had uncovered enough information to send it over to the special grand jury. Evidence linking a Bureau inspector with a conspiracy between the city out of payments due from a large manufacturing plant is also being prepared for presentation to the grand jury.

"In a recent re-inspection of meters in both homes and industrial plants," said Taylor, "we have found that the water meters apparently have been tampered with."

### Hundreds are Broken

Asked how many, he said he was sure of "six or so," but that there were hundreds of broken meters where it was impossible to tell immediately whether they were broken accidentally or not.

He pointed out that the city has only 75 district meter readers and that 75 inspectors who have to devote their attention to such matters as fire hydrants, and other equipment. Only ten of these men devote their time to inspection of homes and factories, he said.

The principal trouble has been infrequency of inspection. He said the city has no system for a periodic check.

In addition, the chief admitted that "there has been a laxness" in the supervision of meters, but nearly all of it has been caused by our inability to get new parts.

Laxity in inspection

It appeared that the Philadelphia approach to inspecting meters has been largely one of going around the meter, or making a call if there was evidence the meter was out of order and not recording properly.

Now Taylor is having a survey made to see how frequently inspectors should be made. When the survey is completed he said Council will make provision for more adequate policing, he said.

Some effort already has been made to prevent cheating. In some cases, tamper-resistant glass has been put in the face of the instruments. In others a lead base has been installed so that tampering will show up in the metal.

## Risen Water Sewer Rates Due

Legislation authorizing increases in both water and sewer rentals based on new rate structures now being considered by city officials in collaboration with the Committee of Fifteen is being introduced in City Council within a few weeks.

The amended water and sewer rate structure will not only correct inequities in existing rentals, but provides the additional revenue required to meet the city's water and water systems as self-supporting projects.

**COURT ACTION TO BE SOUGHT**

Members of Council has approved a temporary 20 percent "across the board" water-rent increase, effective next Jan. 1. The stop-gap legislation was enacted to enable the city to borrow funds during the balance of this year to forestall a stoppage of the current water improvement program an insure the self-support of the water system.

It is considered unlikely the "across the board" increase will ever become effective, because a new rate structure of the new sewer and water-rate structures is believed certain before the end of the year.

Following enactment of permanent water and sewer-rate legislation, the City Solicitor is expected to ask the courts to rectify both systems as self-supporting projects.

It will be pointed out that revenue from increased rates will be sufficient to maintain and liquidate the indebtedness of both the water and sewer systems.

### JACOBS SUBMIT REPORT

Nathan B. Jacobs, water consulting engineer to both Director of Public Works Thomas Buckley and the Committee of Fifteen, already has submitted a preliminary report on a proposed new water-rate structure. He is expected to present final recommendations on water rates a Committee of Fifteen meeting Friday.

The preliminary report contained two proposals, one setting forth rates based on water revenue of approximately \$9,000,000 annually, and the second geared to income of about \$10,000,000.

Under the first proposal, water consumers in un-metered properties would pay a straight 20 percent increase in water rents. It would affect about 232,000 consumers, whose water rents would jump from \$12.25 to \$14.92 annually.

### LARGE USERS AFFECTED

The metered group under the same proposal would receive only one cent of the water allowed under the \$8 minimum. But due to the fact that very few of these consumers, namely householders, use more than 50 percent of the present minimum amount of water, actually there would be no increase in their rates.

The charge for water in excess of the minimum amount would, however, be increased from 40 cents to 80 cents per each 1000 cubic feet of water. Jacobs estimated that would mean about 25 percent increase in water rates of large users.

The second proposal, insuring income of \$10,000,000 annually, would jump rates for unmetered properties 25 percent, with proportionate boosts for metered consumers.

## Revised Water System Urged

Real Estate Men Want Economies in Bureau

A city water system operated with the same efficiency as the one which will be introduced by the Philadelphia Real Estate Board in a discussion of proposed new water rates.

The real estate group, one of several organizations to appear before the Committee of Fifteen during a public hearing on the proposed new rate structure, called yesterday for economies in the operation of the city bureau.

At the hearing in City Hall, John J. Stapleton, chairman of the board's committee on legislation for the water system self-supporting project, said that the Committee of Fifteen that his group approved the basic theory of reducing the quantity of water consumed by minimum rates and uniform cost for excess water usage for all types of consumers.

### \$10 Minimum Proposed

"At the same time," he added, "we wish to point out that the adoption of any plan which calls for regulation of metering and the installation of more meters requires considerable improvement in the present methods in force. It is necessary that the service of meter reading, repair, billing and collection must be as efficient as is now practiced by the other public utilities."

The Chamber of Commerce, in addition to urging complete metering, suggested that some arrangement be worked out to have the water devices read by inspectors for one of the other utilities. The chamber also recommended that a revision be made in the rates for unmetered users.

In their testimony, the Committee of Commercial-Industrial Water Users proposed that all domestic consumers be charged a minimum of \$10 a year. The present rate is \$8.

### Water Authority Asked

The group, composed of representatives of textile manufacturers, laundries, brewers, theaters hotels and other businesses, also said that the change would bring in the \$9,000,000 needed to meet the Water Bureau's needs.

Lindsay H. Mason, vice president of the Philadelphia Association of Water Factors and chairman of the organization, warned that the proposal would not satisfy the Committee of Fifteen ignore inequities among wholesale consumers.

"The city of Philadelphia," he said, "must do something to encourage and not penalize business already in Philadelphia to stay here and to induce others to come."

"Should there be considerations which make more efficient and economical proposals for the Water Bureau impractical, we propose the establishment of an independent Water Commission or Authority."

## Common Pleas Court To Get Hearing Proposed Boost to be Aired Thursday

The proposal to raise the present water rates 20 per cent across the board under the new rate schedule is worked out, will be given a public airing Thursday.

The increase has two aims: to prove the water system self-supporting and to permit continuance of its rehabilitation by the floating of new bonds.

The request for the rate rise was forwarded to Council by the Mayor, on advice of the City Planning Commission.

### System Self Supporting

At present, the water system is self supporting and therefore, unlike most other city activities, is not a charge against the debt limit fixed by statute, for improvements. But under the present trend the day is approaching when the water system will cost more than it takes in. Then, the debt limit will be passed and no further improvements will be possible.

If granted, the rise will enable the City Solicitor's office to go before the Common Pleas Court to prove the system is self supporting and that the water debt should continue to be "excluded" from the general debt. With court consent, the additional loans, at present estimated at \$20,000,000, would be voted next year and in 1950.

Officials admit that some inequities would result from the new rate structure. These could be corrected in the permanent rate structure now in preparation. Nathan Jacobs, consulting engineer, has been retained tentatively by the Committee of Fifteen to start the work. Other engineers will be added to the study.

### Sever Increase Likely

If the water rise is granted, then a proportionate rise will come about in the sewer rents, too, since they are geared, on a sliding scale, to water use.

Today, the margin between the water and sewer rates is about \$100,000, which in a market of fishing costs could be wiped out in a matter of a few days.

On the basis of receipts for 1947 (1948 receipts so far indicate the same) it is estimated that the same 20 per cent rise will net the city an additional \$1,370,000, bringing the average yearly income to \$9,000,000. This proportion of the increase, say, would not only keep the system self-supporting, but allow for the floating of the additional \$20,000,000, with the resulting interest charges.

## Test Term Urged On Water Boost

City Council's proposal to increase water rentals by 20 percent to prove acceptable to commercial and industrial firms here only on a temporary basis, a spokesman for the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce declared yesterday.

J. Harry LaBrum, chairman of the Chamber's water-pollution committee, said in a prepared statement that if a "temporary" ordinance is inserted in the water rental ordinance now pending before Council, business generally would give its approval.

### SMALL CONSUMERS BENEFIT

While he did not say so, LaBrum's statement appeared to be prompted by disclosures made last week that the proposed ordinance, as now drawn, would impose the heaviest burden of increase on the larger firms in the city, while many smaller consumers would escape any boost in rentals.

The Chamber's position toward an increase was reported yesterday to have been accepted by City Hall officials, and approval of the new water rates by City Council—on a purely temporary basis—appeared certain.

As for changing the base for computing water rentals, a move which also is proposed in the pending bill, the Chamber feels that this should be deferred temporarily. LaBrum said. He will present the Chamber's views at a public hearing in City Hall on Thursday, Aug. 19, preparatory to presenting the ordinance to the full City Council for action Aug. 25.

### YEAR'S TRIAL URGED

"Without some relief of the present situation," LaBrum said, "the financial condition of the Water Bureau might be seriously jeopardized." He will suggest, he said, that the rent increase become effective Jan. 1, 1949, and that the ordinance authorizing it shall expire Dec. 31, 1949.

Meanwhile in the one-year period, Director of Public Works Thomas Buckley would submit to City Council a draft of a "new and fairer ordinance." This ordinance probably would provide for a sliding scale of increases instead of an across-the-board increase, as provided in the pending ordinance.

## Headline Hopping New Tune: Going to Take The Kill Out of Schuykill

By Ollie Crawford

VERBROOK and some sections of West and Southwest Philadelphia are to get a new and pure water supply by Christmas. This is putting Santa on a water wagon. Residents will be hanging up their noses, instead of their stockings.

The new water is hailed as odorless and tasteless. How do you know the stuff is there? It's going to be hard to explain to the children. When Junior craves for a drink at night, he wants to hear it rattle. Grandpa wants something he can sink his teeth into.

This means the end of the "Schuykill cocktail." That was the drink they sold only one of a Zombar there. Schuykill is an old Dutch word, meaning "Creek with a Reek." It's the world's only dusty river. Indians who lived there were led by Chief Running Away From Water. It was a branch of the Blackfoot tribe. But some people liked it. Pure sediment. The old water was good to the last drop. But that last drop. Wow.

Overbrook used to be the only place where people drank water with a whisky chaser. Even the faucets turned up their noses and when people watered the lawn, the grass put up umbrellas.

When you asked for a drink of water, they said: "How many lumps, please?" One circus visitor asked: "How does this water come?" Through an elephant's trunk? Schuykill's water once stumped the experts on "20 questions." They couldn't even guess whether it was animal, vegetable, or mineral.

## Water Easy to Take

Two years ago the city decided that at least for the present it would not go to the mountains for its water, but would see what could be accomplished by additional treatment of water from the existing Delaware and Schuykill sources.

This water, as delivered to consumers, was known to be safe, but it often carried objectionable tastes and odors.

Now a million-dollar "ozone" plant, believed to be the largest in the world, is on the point of going into operation on the water filtered at the Belmont station. If predictions of the engineers are borne out, the Overbrook section will soon have water easy to take under all conditions at all times of the year.

Later, other sections will benefit from the new process, which had been tested for two years on a small scale before it was authorized on a large scale.

There will doubtless continue to be people who will object to water that has had to be doctored for safety, taste and odors. They would prefer water that has never been impure.

But there is probably no water anywhere that has not at some time gone through the purifying processes of nature and the engineers. The two processes are of course essentially the same, except that the engineers can usually do the job faster.

The city may have to go to distant sources some day for more water. There is ground for hope that problems of quality can be solved in less expensive ways.

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