

# Special For Increased Water, 25, 000 to Get Refunds

## 25 Pct. Ceiling Ordered on Rate Rises

Illustrated on Page 36  
**By WILLIAM F. FEIST**

A sweeping rollback in water rentals for unmetred properties and imposition of a 25 percent ceiling on increases in current water bills over the 1948 level were ordered by a caucus of City Council members yesterday, in response to widespread protests against rates that have soared as high as 300 percent above normal.

As a result of Council's action, 65,000 bills for excess water charges on unmetred properties, already prepared and ready for mailing, were held up indefinitely by the Bureau of Water.

**25,000 TO GET REFUNDS**

About 25,000 water users in unmetred properties will receive "prompt" refunds on their current water and sewer bills following the Council order. The refunding program, which is being handled by the chief of the Water Bureau, said the refunds will go into mail immediately after final enabling legislation is passed by Council about June 30.

Yesterday's Council order, which followed disclosure by the Inquirer of enormous water rent increases, also extends the time limit for payment of 1948 water and sewer bills. However, it says that no penalties will apply on bills paid before that date.

**INFORMAL APPROVAL**

Informal approval of the necessary legislation to make these changes possible was voted as a caucus of Council members. The legislation itself will be introduced in that body tomorrow.

In addition to the changes already listed, it will require the Director of Public Works to make a survey of existing water rates and report back to Council with recommendations for necessary changes, and to submit a program of progressive metering so that all properties may be metered in the shortest possible time.

**CALLED BY MEADE**

The Council caucus, called by William F. Meade, chairman of the Republican City Committee, to adjust inequities in water charges, was a direct outgrowth of pressures by the Inquirer that the combination water and sewer charges on many small properties was nearly as much as the real estate taxes on those same properties.

Meade, who with Sheriff Austin Mehan and other city leaders attended the meeting, explained that

the water charges on unmetred properties were so out of line with those charged in metered properties that some remedial legislation must be adopted by Council.

**NEW FIXTURES REPORTED**

Taylor, who also attended the meeting, estimated that about 25,000 water users in unmetred properties would receive refunds on their current water and sewer bills.

He said about 31,000 properties were re-inspected last year for unreported water fixtures and about half of them showed newly installed fixtures. He said, however, that about half of the water users will be entitled to refunds.

The refunds will be mailed direct to the water users by the City Treasurer following enactment of the proposed legislation, which will be passed finally by Council as early as June 30.

**BORROWING POWER**

Assistant City Solicitor Herman N. Schwartz, while preparing the legislation for introduction in Council, said it was likely, however, the ordinance would be passed finally on July 7.

City officials at the same time, expressed confidence that the rollback of rates would not affect the city's borrowing power or seriously impair its credit rating, which had been maintained at an "A" level.

They pointed out that this year's water revenue and the self-sufficiency of the water system, plus maintenance and amortization of the water debt, were based on an overall increase of 25 percent in the water rates.

**REPORT ON REVENUE**

Meanwhile, Receiver of Taxes W. Frank Marshall announced that water receipts for the current year total \$3,720,412. The estimated yield for the year is about \$9,000,000. However, less than half of the current bills have not been paid.

The caucus of Council requested by Meade was attended by Mehan, Director of Public Works Thomas Buckley, Fred C. Garman, president of Council, Assistant City Solicitor Schwartz, City Controller Francis S. Demmon, Merchants' Association members and technical staff from the Receiver of Taxes' office and the Bureau of Water.

Earlier in the day about 25 members of the Master Plumbers Association called on Garman to present statements of city officials that plumbers had stepped up the charges for installation of water meters from \$35 to \$75.

**SUGGESTIONS MADE**

They also made recommendations to increase the number of installations. Action on the suggestion Garman appointed a committee of city officials to meet with representatives of plumbers to eliminate red tape in the issuance of permits for meter installations.

E. H. Hoover, a plumbing and heating contractor, and one of the association's spokesmen, said Garman said that plumbers are forced to visit as many as five different businesses and spend as much as a day as well as the necessary meter installation permits.

**4-YEAR LAG ON REPAIRS**

He said unreported meters are piled mountain-high at the city's meter repair shop, 29th and Cambridge streets, and he personally knew of meters which had been there from four to five years.

He said he and his associates particularly resented charges made by Councilman Louis Meena that plumbers were charging as high as \$75 and asked that Meena make a public apology for his statement.

"What is the public thinking of us," he declared, "when even city officials call us crooks and thieves."

Meana denied that he had made a blanket charge against plumbers, but said he knew some plumbers who were charging as much as \$75. "I don't say all plumbers charge as high as \$75," he declared. "I know most plumbers are on the up and up. There are a few who overcharge, however. My own brother is a meter plumber."

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**WATER BILL CEILING EXTENSION JURED**

James A. Finnegan, Democratic City Chairman, yesterday demanded that City Council place a 25 percent ceiling on the increase in water rates charged tenants of unmetred properties.

Finnegan, in a letter to Frederic D. Demmon, president of City Council, declared that consumers in unmetred properties should share the same benefits accorded for users in unmetred properties. Council, in a caucus on Tuesday, limited the increase in unmetred properties to 20 percent.

Finnegan said while the decision of Council "was commendable," it does not go far enough. In the first place, there is no mention of any restriction on the amount of the increase which must be paid by metered water users.

"I urge," Finnegan continued, "that the 25 percent limitation be applied to all increases in water and sewer rent bills, whether the rate supply is metered or unmetred."

Finnegan chided City Council for practicing "an amount of hypocrisy" that the legislature is forced to investigate of the Water Bureau, and particularly of the wide-scale charges for the installation of water meters on large commercial users, the existence of which was admitted by Robert J. Taylor, head of the Water Bureau.

# City to Consider Water Protectors

**By WILLIAM F. FEIST**

Worried by the flood of protests over a city's increases in unmetred water bills, City Council planned to meet in executive session Tuesday to devise some way of approaching rate matters.

Fear was expressed generally, and particularly by Republican committee-men, that unmetred property owners, given the voters may express their resentment by voting against the administration and the party at the coming election.

Council took cognizance of the flood of protests yesterday when its Finance Committee last Thursday following disclosures in The Inquirer that the combination water and sewer charges for some properties almost equal the city real estate taxes on these same homes.

**CAN CUT WATER RATES**

Robert J. Taylor, chief of the Water Bureau, told the committee that Council has the power to lower the water rates, but Councilman Clarence K. Crossan warned him that such a step would "seriously upset our financial picture."

Much the same advice was given by Assistant City Solicitor Herman Schwartz, who said the increased rates were intended only to provide sufficient revenue to maintain the municipal water system and continue to make it self-supporting.

Schwartz pointed out that while some unmetred property owners were paying considerably more than the 25 percent maximum increase authorized under the new water rent schedule, the excess portion was due to unreported water fixtures in their homes.

**BASIS OF COURT FLEA**

The Assistant City Solicitor also explained the new rates were the basis of the city's petition to the courts to exclude new water delinquents from the city's borrowing power.

The city expects to spend \$100,000 on the new law to continue the water improvement program.

"Therefore, any move to reduce existing water rates would not only hurt the current municipal budget out of line, but put the city's borrowing capacity in jeopardy," he explained.

Taylor offered a ray of hope for the overburdened taxpayers with the announcement that owners of unmetred properties would be put on the metered rate schedule as early as next January provided they made application to have water meters installed before Nov. 30, 1949.

He said this provision was inserted in the ordinance boosting water rates as an incentive to property owners to install meters. He admitted the unmetred rate schedule "is about the most unreasonable that can be devised," at the same time, he insisted the metered rates were very fair.

**PLUMBERS URGE BOOSTING PRICES**

The Philadelphia Plumbers Association, which has been protesting against the city's water rate increases, urged City Council to raise the rates for unmetred properties to the level of metered properties.

The association's spokesman, E. H. Hoover, said that plumbers are being forced to visit as many as five different businesses and spend as much as a day as well as the necessary meter installation permits.

**JOINED IN PROTEST**

Tubis was joined in his protest by John D. Crawford, secretary of the Real Merchant Plumbers Association.

"I feel that the plumbers of this city are entitled to an opportunity to correct the impressions that have been unfairly created," Tubis told Buckley. "The plumbers of this city have a very vital interest in the health and welfare of our citizens."

Hoover added that a hearing is set in the near future, "at which time our association as well as others can present their views and attempt to correct the defamatory impressions that have been instilled in the minds of the general public."

**ASK RECHECK ON RENTALS**

At the same time, representatives of the Philadelphia Real Estate Board urged upon City Council President Frederic D. Demmon a "re-examination" of the subject of city water rentals.

"The bills that have been rendered for unmetred water, certainly, appear to be conclusive proof of the inequality of the rates as that are being imposed," said John J. Stapleton, general chairman of the legislative affairs committee of the Board, in a letter to Garman.

"We are quite sure that City Council, which is not inclined at any time to be unreasonable and unwise in its legislation on behalf of the home owners, will upon careful examination of this situation take the necessary action to insure that unmetred water rates are inequitable and unreasonable."

**CITIES REPAIR SITUATION**

"It has been publicized and likewise admitted," Stapleton added, "that about 50,000 water meters are in charge of the Bureau of Water for repair. The repair of these meters and the reinstallation of them is a factor in this situation which, in my opinion, is real and of serious consideration and action."

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The city's failure, until recently, to make an intensive survey of unreported water fixtures has cost the municipality hundreds of thousands of dollars in revenue. A half-hearted attempt to locate these fixtures had previously been made, but it was not until the Committee of Fifteen insisted on a thorough probe that it was undertaken seriously.

Taylor said the survey has covered all but 10 of the city's 52 wards and that thousands of unreported fixtures had been discovered. Crossan told his colleagues that in one small ward alone approximately 40,000 extra fixtures had been discovered on which the property owners were paying nothing.

**WATER AUTHORITY URGED BY MAYOR; BACKED BY C OF C**

With the unanimous indorsement of the Chamber of Commerce, Mayor Bernard Samuel yesterday asked City Council to create a Water and Sewer Authority to take over the whole municipal water and sewerage systems.

Power assigned 11 years ago to the Philadelphia Authority but never used, would be revoked under the Mayor's plan, which was referred to Council's Law Committee.

City Council also formally received yesterday the ameliorative measures decided upon at a caucus on Tuesday.

**SHORT OF POLITICS**

"A Water and Sewer Authority," Sheronas wrote, "would permit efficient operation of these utilities by taking them out of politics and allowing them to be operated by business men."

Sheronas wrote that present plans envision a 40-million-dollar sewer and sewage disposal program and a 10-million-dollar water improvement program. These should be administered by an authority, he said.

**LACK OF METERS CITED**

He pointed out that less than half of some 500,000 homes in this city have been metered and said that "in many instances" meters that "in many instances" meters that have been installed have been removed for repairs "and never returned."

"This has resulted in the present disparity of rates which has caused a public uproar," he said, citing instances in which comparable homes have paid \$4 yearly for water, if metered, and \$40 yearly, if not metered.

**TWO POINTS STRESSED**

The Mayor's letter of transmittal, with a draft of an ordinance creating a Water and Sewer Authority, did not mention the need for a Water and Sewer Authority, did not mention the need for a Water and Sewer Authority, did not mention the need for a Water and Sewer Authority.

**WATER RATE REVISION HELPS BUT SPEED METRAGE**

The readjustment in water rates on unmetred properties agreed to by City Council will relieve a situation, exposed by The Inquirer, which has worked injustice upon thousands of taxpayers.

It will roll back rates to a maximum of 25 percent over the 1948 level and will mean relief to thousands of taxpayers whose water charges had suddenly been increased up to 300 percent above normal.

The Councilmatic action follows this newspaper's disclosures that many property owners found their water and sewer rates approaching the amount paid in real estate taxes.

The rollback will be helpful but it is no permanent solution for water rate inequities. The solution is still universal meterage. If every taxpayer had a water meter he would pay a fair charge on the water used and costly wastage of water, especially in hot weather, would be avoided.

Only about one-half of the city's 430,000 outlets are metered at the present time. The Water Bureau officially encourages the installation of meters but as a practical matter it emmeshes the whole subject in a vast amount of red tape. Plumbers say they are shunted from one bureau to another and delayed for many days in seeking installation permits. Meters sent to the Water Bureau for repairs are piled up like coal in a bin awaiting their turn. It has been estimated at City Hall that it would take five years under the best conditions to complete city-wide meterage.

There should be some way to expedite it. Council, besides reducing rates, has asked the Director of Public Works to submit a program of progressive metering so that all outlets may be metered in the shortest possible time. It has also ordered a survey of the water rate structure, with recommendations for possible changes.

"The whole water rent structure here has been a hodge-podge for many years. A city half-metered, half-unmetered, has inevitably resulted in rate inequities that can be remedied only by the metering of all, with reasonable rates charged for the service given."

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**PHILADELPHIA WATER DEPARTMENT HISTORICAL COLLECTION 2004.019.0028A**

**WATER, WATER, EVERYWHERE:** Walter Phillips, who gave up on the GOP & switched to the Dems as his best hope for cleaning up City Hall, is on the warpath against the proposed Water & Sewer Authority. Says he: "The plan is nothing more than a potential 'boodle deal' in the water trust deal. It takes the water system out of civil service—and lets the politically-appointed Authority members hire & fire at will."

"The Authority gets a free hand with the projected \$100,000,000 sewer improvement plan. Without any trouble they could scrap it or boost it up to \$300,000,000 or more. They could make any deals they want—including the Leigh Co. & Navigation land-selling offer made to the city."

His guess at the real reason behind the Authority idea is to free the GOP from a headache & attempt to stop the Demos on making water a campaign issue.

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