

Dear Charlton Residents:

In an effort to provide information to the taxpayers and ratepayers of the Town Of Charlton, the Water and Sewer Commission will submit an article for the next few months to the Charlton Gazette. For our first subject we will attempt to discuss a very "hot" topic - sewer rates. We will address what we believe is misinformation that has been disseminated regarding this issue.

Fact: The current billing structure for sewer user fees is based on Title V criteria and has been in place since 1989 and we believe since the beginning of the billing system.

Fact: The current rate of .0065 per gallon has been in effect since 2000. We have not increased the rate for 5 years! (One reason that we have been able to hold the rate is that we have reviewed all the records and discovered and established over 30 accounts not previously billed)

Fact: We are currently billing over 520 users with Title V.

A question one might have is why has there been so much press lately about an established billing system? We discovered 11 accounts comprised of 3 residences and 8 businesses that were being billed on their water meter data and not on Title V sewer usage. The commission believed this was totally unfair, as all users should be treated the same, so we sought legal counsel's opinion on how to correct this error. On July 1, 2005 we changed the 11 accounts, which we believed were being subsidized by all the other users, to the same Title V billing method. The commission **agrees** that having meters for everyone and a metered rate would be the fairest way to bill all sewer customers. In order for us to establish and implement a metered program for **all** system users we must do the following:

1. Prepare, review, and adopt a meter policy to address installation, inspection, maintenance, repair, billing procedures and cost of meters
2. Review, solicit bids, and select a meter
3. Hire a rate consultant and establish a metered rate and review yearly

Since the new commission was established in May of 2002 we have worked diligently on identifying problems and correcting them. The establishment of meters is one of those problems we wish we could have addressed sooner. Please note the installation of meters will not reduce the annual operating cost of the wastewater treatment facility – it will actually increase the cost. Implementing this procedure will require an appropriation and supplying all users with meters will require a significant capital investment. In an effort to control costs we are also soliciting bids from private companies to run our Wastewater Treatment Facility. We are hopeful that the bids will be competitive and that we can pass on any savings to the customer. We are making great progress towards the establishment of meters and have received a draft of the meter policies and have hired a rate consultant to assist us in setting the rates. Our goal is to have meters available for July 1, 2006 and I am working, along with the entire commission, to make this happen.

Thanks for taking the time to read the article and look for next month's update topic –Special Legislation!

Sincerely,
Sandy Dam
Chairman

P.S. For the Record -one important problem we have addressed is that the budget to operate the treatment plant has been continually supplemented from the general fund. This year's budget is approximately \$800,000 and should be paid for by the users of the system and not the general taxpayer of the Town Of Charlton. The majority of the taxpayers have their own septic systems that they are responsible for. The taxpayers of Charlton should be pleased to know that over the last 2-3 years we have operated this facility on the revenues received from users of the system.