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FORT WORTH — --Water rates for typical residential users in Fort Worth would rise 5 percent in fiscal 2014, as the city's cost of raw water continues to rise at the same time demand softens.

Sewer rates for the typical user would rise 4 percent, as the city tries to adjust for lower demand, the city's water director said Friday in a proposal to City Council members.

Mayor Betsy Price said she expects the City Council, which blocked a water rate increase a year ago but approved a sewer increase, will approve both proposed increases in the 2014 budget, which the council got a first look at this week.

"You don't want to minimize it," Price said Friday in an interview. "It will hit people, but it's not a huge increase."

The city's cost of buying raw water from the Tarrant Regional Water District is rising 14 percent in 2014, as the district builds a \$2.3 billion, 90-mile pipeline into the county from east of Dallas. At the same time, demand for water has been flat or down, with conservation, more efficient appliances and construction codes.

"While we're driving down usage, the growth in the city is still going up," said Price, who was in last year's 5-4 vote against a water increase.

The city's sewer volumes have dropped in recent years, causing a gap between the volumes used to set rates and the actual billed volumes, Water Director Frank Crumb said.

"We got a little over-optimistic on our growth estimates and they didn't materialize," Crumb said. "So we're just trying to get that back in line and correct it."

Members of a city water rate "stakeholder" group reviewed the city's proposal and gave it positive feedback, Crumb and Mary Gugliuzza, water department spokeswoman, said.

Fort Worth's raw water costs will more than double in the next 10 years, but pressure to raise sewer rates should lessen, Crumb said.

"If this goes through, we would expect fairly modest increases on the sewer side for awhile, because we're pretty much caught up on infrastructure," he said in an interview.

Water rates

Under the proposed increases, the monthly service fee would increase for all water users, based on meter size, with the smallest increases for the smallest meters.

The monthly water volume charge – assessed per hundred cubic feet – would increase for the two highest levels of users, only 9 percent of residential customers, Gugliuzza said. The volume charge would increase for all commercial, industrial, super user, gas well, and irrigation customers.

The water department estimated a "typical" residential water user – one with a 5/8-inch meter and monthly usage of 10.22 hundred cubic feet – would see a \$1.50 increase in her monthly service fee to \$9. The customer's volume charge would not change.

The monthly bill in that case would be \$30.98, up from \$29.48.

An "efficient" residential user – one with a 5/8-inch meter and monthly usage of 4 hundred cubic feet – would see the same increase in the service fee and no increase in the volume charge. That user's monthly bill would be \$16.88 up from \$15.38, the water department estimated.

Ninety one percent of residential users fit in the typical and efficient tiers, Gugliuzza said.

Sewer rates

Volume charges for all sewer customers would increase, but monthly service fees will stay the same under the city's proposal.

A typical residential sewer user — one with a 5/8-inch meter and monthly volume of 6.12 hundred cubic feet – would see her volume charge rise to \$18.36 from \$17.44, for a total annual increase of \$11.04, the water department estimated.

An efficient residential sewer user – one with volume of 3 hundred cubic feet – would see the volume charge rise to \$9 monthly from \$8.55, for a total annual increase of \$5.40, the water department estimated.

The city aims to raise a total \$170.9 million in water revenue next year with the rates, up 6.41 percent; and a total \$122.6 million in sewer revenue with the rates, up 5.27 percent.

The water department used reserves to fill in the gap after the council voted last year's water rate increase down, but Crumb said that isn't possible again.

City Council members also will review a proposed elimination of 36 vacant firefighter jobs, all assigned to the Fire Department's vacation relief pool, after Fire Chief Rudy Jackson [told them Thursday that response times would suffer at certain stations](#).

"There's a possibility we can do some shifting and not have as quite an impact, we hope," Price said Friday in an interview. "At first blush, it's pretty alarming, but we want to get deeper into it and make sure we get what we need."

Council members probably will ask the city staff to restore some of the proposed cuts to the Code Compliance department's budget, Price told a community coffee Thursday night on the Near South Side. The budget cuts five animal control positions and five code positions; council members expressed concern over the proposal.

"I expect you may see some shifting" in the final budget when the council approves it in September, Price said during the coffee.

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