

Albemarle's water customers to see lower rates
written by Newspark Team | June 20, 2013



Albemarle County's water and sewer authority has approved its annual budget and rates for the next fiscal year. The average single-family household will see its water costs drop while commercial rates will remain the same for 2013-2014.

"I think the best news is our average single-family residential user will see a 1-percent decrease in their rates," said Gary O'Connell, executive director of the Albemarle County Service Authority. "All the other monthly user rates will remain the same and the connection fee proposal is a 4 percent increase."

On Thursday, the ACSA Board of Directors unanimously approved the \$25.8 million budget for fiscal year 2014. That amount is a decrease over the current year's budget. The board also approved a \$ million capital improvement program.

"Our overall water use per household is continuing to decline," O'Connell said. "We think it's a pretty positive thing and it shows people are doing the right kinds of things around their house in terms of water conservation and water use."

"One of the things we have found makes the biggest difference are people changing out to the new low flow toilets," O'Connell said. "That makes a 40 percent difference we've found in homeowner's use."

"If someone has not done that, we have a toilet rebate program and I'd encourage people to take advantage of that," O'Connell added. "It will pay itself back very quickly."

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, replacing a home's old toilets with water-saving models can save \$90 per year in utility bills and \$2,000 over the lifetime of the toilets.

The ACSA has continued a trend of raising the fees for new water and sewer connections for new home builders. In 2000, developers paid an average of \$2,573 in connection fees. For fiscal year 2014, the cost will be \$13,062, an increase of 4-percent over this year.

The authority added one new fee related to meter tampering. Customers who tamper with or bypass a meter will face a \$250 penalty in addition to any criminal charges and fees.

"We have instances where people have cut locks off of their meters in addition to bypassing the meter itself," said finance director Lisa Breeden. "That involves a lot of staff time and investigation. This is an attempt on our part to try and recoup the time that is lost in instances like this."

No members of the public who spoke at the budget public hearing. ACSA chairman Clarence Roberts attributed that to the outreach efforts of ACSA staff.

"Having no one come forward on behalf of the public reveals to me the great job you all have done on educating the public on our budget processes and budget needs," Roberts said. "I know that [staff] have had meetings with various groups and organizations and met with members of the public to answer their questions."

In other business Breeden was recognized by the ACSA board of directors for her 25 years of service to the organization. Roberts presented Breeden with a resolution and plaque in front of her staff.

"Thank you for all the time and for providing the right kind of financial leadership and oversight," said board member Bill Kittrell to Breeden. "I have come to recognize ... just how well managed we are financially and how well positioned we are financially, and that is no small task in this day and time."