

In October 2016, officials from the City of Syracuse called a meeting to discuss with the County their concerns about how sewer unit charges were applied to mixed use properties. The city's protocol for classifying properties created an unfair situation in which similar type properties, primarily mixed use, were charged differently. As a result, in April 2017, the County Legislature adopted a resolution amending the sewer rate schedule to clarify and standardize the way in which these charges are applied. The resolution that was adopted will take effect in January 2018. The changes are summarized below:

1. Clarification for applying sewer charges to mixed-use properties.

The manner in which charges are assessed to mixed-use properties (those which have both commercial and residential apartment spaces) was clarified so that the long existing rate of three-quarters of a unit per apartment is applied to all apartment units, not only those contained in free standing apartment buildings. After discussions with the City of Syracuse and several Town Assessors, it was discovered that some of these mixed-use properties were categorized as commercial only spaces and were, therefore, billed based upon volume only. This change is meant to ensure that all apartment units, regardless of the type of property they are in, are billed at three quarters of a unit per apartment, as stipulated in the legislation adopted in 1978. Apartment only properties will not be impacted by this change; only mixed commercial and residential properties may be affected, depending upon the manner in which they were previously assessed by the local assessor. There were a variety of methods of assessment used across the sanitary district, hence the need for clarification to ensure all ratepayers are paying their fair share.

2. Change to the baseline level for minimum usage.

The basic usage rate to establish minimum use was changed from 140,000 gallons per year to 137,000 gallons per year, per unit. This 2% change will serve to encourage water conservation and redistribute a small percentage of the overall cost of services from households to large volume customers. This change helps to allocate the system costs among users more equitably.

It is important to note that changes to the schedule will not become effective until January 2018. These changes alone will not affect the total amount collected by WEP and will not directly impact single family households or multi-family residential properties. The result of these changes may actually benefit single family customers, as large users and those who may have been previously under-assessed by others, will now be paying their fair share. The County remains committed to keeping the unit rate steady and affordable for all of its customers.

Even though single family households will continue to pay one sewer unit, regardless of water use, conservation is still appreciated.