

Higher sewer bills coming to Holyoke after council approves rate hike

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HOLYOKE — Facing aging infrastructure and residents’ rising cost of living, the Holyoke City Council has approved a sewer rate increase that will push bills higher for most users.

The City Council approved an increase to \$8.76 per 1,000 gallons, up from \$7.50, as part of an effort to shore up a sewer enterprise fund facing an estimated \$1.2 million shortfall.

The move reflects long-running debates about whether the system should fully pay for itself through user fees or continue relying in part on general tax revenue.

Councilors ultimately landed on a middle-ground rate after removing street sweeping costs from the original \$9.11 proposal, but several warned that years of underinvestment and aging infrastructure — in some cases more than a century old — are driving unavoidable increases.

The debate didn’t just play out in council chambers. Earlier in the week, two councilors took to the airwaves to break down the proposed increase — and the politics behind it — in plain terms.

Councilors use podcast to walk through sewer rate decision

Speaking on their “Crabbiness Hour” podcast, City Councilors Anne Thalheimer and Mimi Panitch tried to break down the sewer rate debate in simple terms, explaining how a proposed \$9.11 rate was lowered to \$8.76 and why the costs are divided the way they are.

“The City Council settled somewhere in the middle,” Thalheimer said, noting the final number came after removing street sweeping costs from the original proposal and shifting them elsewhere in the budget.

Panitch said the discussion comes down to the difference between taxpayers and ratepayers.