

# New water, sewer rates for Wiarton

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By Rob Gowan

South Bruce Peninsula will phase in new sewer rates in Wiarton to ease the expected financial burden on users.

Town council instructed staff on Tuesday to move forward with the water and sewer rates increases as recommended by a working group. The bylaw is to be on council's May 21 agenda, while the rates expected to come into effect on July 1.

The new rates will see water users in the town pay a \$25 monthly charge plus \$1.45 per cubic metre.

But the working group recommended the target sewer rate - 180% of the water rate - be phased in over three years because of the sizeable increase on the sewer portion of some bills. The rate is to be reviewed annually.

Coun. Jim Turner, who was on the working group, said the rates proposed are necessary to cover the cost of operating the system including repair and replacement work.

"Do I like it? No, but somebody has to bite the bullet," said Turner. "A lot of previous councils have failed to recognize the need to put some money aside to fix what is there."

Under the phase-in plan, sewer rates will be \$25 a month and \$1.45/cu. m. In 2013, the sewer rate will increase to a \$35 fixed rate plus \$2.03 per cu. m.) and in 2015, it will increase \$45 and \$2.62 per cu. m.

The system will operate at a deficit until 2015 with the shortfall drawn from the sewer reserve. It is expected about \$300,000 will have to be drawn from reserves before the sustainable funding level is reached in 2015.

"Putting money away for future work has never been done before, certainly in the areas of water and sewer and a lot of infrastructure," said Turner. "It may not be popular, but it has to be done or the town will fall apart."

Council decided to review water and sewer rates in Wiarton last year after receiving complaints about financial hardships from residents after the town went from a fixed rate to a metered rate.

Gateway Haven, the Bruce County-owned long-term care facility in Wiarton, saw its water and sewer bill jump to \$5,900 per month from \$1,400.

Turner said the new rates should spread the cost more evenly across users in the system and not lead to inflated bills, such as those experienced by large water users like Gateway Haven and the Wiarton hospital.

"We have tried to balance the rates so they don't pay an exorbitant rate because they are huge users, but they do pay for what they use," Turner said. "We think we came up with a pretty fair and balanced rate."

A similar review was done of the Amabel-Sauble water system after some residents saw their bills shoot up after the town went to a metered rate there. Users of that system pay a fixed charge of

\$85, a reserve charge of \$20 and a metered charge of \$1.32/cu. m.