

Letter to the Editor: Passaic Valley Water Commission Charges Are Out of Control

Recently, a Clifton senior citizen called me to tell me about their Passaic Valley Water Commission bill and ask what we could do about these outrageous charges. For example, this Clifton senior citizen (who lives alone) had a water bill of \$56.53 for the billing period of Oct 14, 2009 to January 8, 2009. (The bill consists of two service charges and two usage charges since the billing period overlapped into 2010 and there was a price increase.) This bill consists of two service charges in the amount of \$45.06 and \$4.15 for a total of \$49.21. The usage portion of the bill was \$6.70 and \$0.62 for a total of \$7.32. The service fee of \$49.21 was 87% of the bill. The service fee is based on the meter size of the pipe which brings the water into your home. In this case the meter size of the pipe was 5/8 inch. Imagine even if this person didn't use one drop of water, the bill still would have been \$49.21.

In my case, my water bill for this same period was \$184.57. My service fees were \$112.66 and \$10.38 for a total of \$123.04. The usage portion of my bill was \$5.20 and \$56.33 for a total of \$61.53. In my home, the meter size of the pipe is 1 inch. So, even if I didn't use one drop of water, my bill still would have been \$123.04. My service fee is was more than two and ½ times greater than a home with a 5/8 inch pipe.

Here are some other interesting facts that I have uncovered about these service fees. According to Passaic Valley Water Commission, the service fees (as I have mentioned) depend on the meter size of the pipe your home has to bring the water into your house. There are three different size pipes in most residential homes: 5/8 inch; ¾ inch, or 1 inch. The price increase for the service fees in 2010 are based on the size of the pipe. If you have a 5/8 inch pipe your service fee increased 4% to \$51.02 per quarter from \$49.05 per quarter in 2009 (in 2008 your service fee was \$46.55 per quarter) – so from 2008 to 2010 your service fee increased 9.6%. If you have a ¾ inch pipe your service fee for 2010 rose 6.3% to \$76.52 per quarter from \$72.00 in 2009 (in 2008 your service fee was \$65.82 – so from 2008 to 2010 your service fee increased 16.3%). If you are as lucky as I am to have a 1 inch pipe your service fee for 2010 rose 4% to \$127.54 per quarter from \$122.64 (in 2008 your service fee was \$100.51 per quarter – so from 2008 to 2010 your service fee rose 26.9%).

On top of these outrageous service fees, Passaic Valley Water Commission raised the usage charge 10.1% for all Clifton customers to \$1.52 per CCF of water consumed from \$1.38 per CCF in 2009. Imagine, a 10% increase in water usage fees and between a 4% to 6% increase in service fees. Have you received these kinds of increases in your salary in 2010 from 2009? I know senior citizens haven't! I also know that workers in the private sector haven't seen raises in many years!

These outrageous service fees have troubled me for a long time. I have reached out to both the Passaic Valley Water Commission and to the Clifton Commissioners (Gloria Kolodziej and Tom DeVita). No one can give me an reasonable answer as to why the service fee charges are so varied. No one can tell me why customers with a 1 inch pipe pay a service fee of more than two and ½ times greater than customers with a 5/8 pipe. According to many engineers I know, having a larger size pipe only means that you use more water quickly than those with a smaller size pipe so that the water usage would be greater.

What can you do about these outrageous charges? Governor Christie has publicly criticized the Passaic Valley Sewage Commission's high salaries, outrageous pension benefits and buyout packages and would be interested in hearing about the outrageous fees charged by Passaic Valley Water Commission. Governor Christie may be reached at (609)292-6000 (ask to speak with one of his aides) or write to the Governor at: Office of the Governor PO Box 08625 Trenton, NJ 08625. You may also reach out to Clifton Commissioners Kolokziej or DeVita through either a phone call (both numbers are listed) or write to each commissioner c/o Passaic Valley Water Commission 1525 Main Ave Clifton, NJ 07101.

Between the outrageous water bills and sewage bills combined with the ever-increasing property taxes, it is no wonder that the number of homes for sale in Clifton is at an all time high and foreclosures are at record numbers. Senior citizens and working families are being driven out of Clifton due to these run-away charges and taxes! The voice of the people must be heard!

Mary Sadrakula
Clifton, NJ